



COUSIN FRANK EXPLAINS WHY THE MISTLETOE GROWS.

DRAWN BY A. HUNT.

The Coloured Supplement.

"MY DARLING'S BETTER!"

No monarch more supremely rules
Than does a Babe with despot sway;
All in its household-kingdom serfs,
Proud to obey.

To kingly sceptre is transformed
The rattle in its puny hand,
Its subjects watchful to attend
Its least command.

A burst of music, wedding bells,
The wild bird's carol, lover's wooing,
Are sweet; but sweeter far to them
Is Baby's cooing.

And each event of Babyhood—
The coming of its firstling tooth,
When first it walked, and first it talked—
Is told, forsooth,

As though some grave affair of state
Held everyone within its spell,
When happy mothers of their babes
Rare marvels tell.

All in the house allegiance yield,
And of its sense and beauty rave;
But chief the doting mother proves
Its veriest slave.

Ah! what is like a mother's love,
With every virtue in its train!
There's our near neighbour, Mrs. Dove—
We thought her vain;

Too fond of company, where she
Out-dazzled all at ball or rout,
Until her Darling's illness brought
Her virtues out.

Slight chafe of polished manners oft
Shows what mean nature lies concealed;
With Mrs. Dove 'twas sterling worth
Shone out revealed.

Have you not known o'er summer sky
A gathering storm its blackness fling—
While in the dread expectant hush
Birds cease to sing?

So fared it when our neighbour's child
Needed the doctor's utmost care;
Death's shadow, thickening in its gloom,
Hung pall-like there.

Poor Mrs. Dove gave up at once
Coquetting with her wit and beauty;
All thoughts absorbed in mother's love,
Transcending duty.

Her child with watchful care she tended
Unceasingly, by day and night,
While hopes and fears thronged, interblended,
In dizzying flight.

Her husband and their two big boys
On tiptoe crept about the house,
While lively Clara, moping, sat,
Still as a mouse.

Have you not known a summer storm
Make clear the air, sweet odours bringing—
The sky again a flood of light,
And birds gay singing?

So quickly turned to light and life
Our neighbour's dwelling, erst so dark:
The boys hurraed, and Clara sang
Gay as a lark.

For had not the good doctor told them
Their Darling now was past all fear?
Indeed he quite forgot to scold them
For their wild cheer.

So, trooping into Baby's room,
They rushed to see their little sister;
And, disregarding all commands,
They hugged and kissed her.

The mother, who, the illness through,
When driven to the verge of madness,
Could find no blest relief in tears,
Now wept for gladness.

To right and left the good news flew,
By word of mouth or briefest letter;
This being all her bulletin—
My Darling's Better! JOHN LATEY.

[The above picture, "My Darling's Better," has also been engraved on steel, and Artists' Proofs will shortly be published at 198, Strand.]

BREAKERS AHEAD!

Out in the dark, where the waves roll high
And the sleepless ocean curls and tumbles,
The pilot stares at the broad black sky,
While the thunder ever nearer grumbles.
But the ship must still sail on, perforce,
With none but he to guide her course,
Though a warning voice through the air hath sped,
And chilled his heart with its message dread:
"Take care! take care!
To the windward bear!
Breakers ahead—breakers ahead!
Pilot, beware!
There are breakers ahead!"

Hard a starboard he puts the ship,
From the line where the dim grey surf assembles;
Though white in the cold is his tight-drawn lip
His heart fears not, his hand never trembles.
He thinks not of home, nor of life and death,
Nor his mother's prayer, nor his sweetheart's faith;
He moves not a muscle, he breathes not a breath,
But holds right on, for the keen voice saith—
"Keep there, keep there!
To the windward bear!
Breakers ahead—breakers ahead!
Pilot, beware!
There are breakers ahead!"

EDWARD ROSE.

THE MISSES POPKIN.

BY MRS. J. H. RIDDELL.

CHAPTER I.

TOLD BY MR. MARGISON.

You should know them, dear reader, you really should, not because they are great, or grand, or clever, or rich, or beautiful, but simply because they are unique.

They are like one of the bits of china by which people nowadays set such store—cracked, very possibly, but none the less rare or valuable for all that.

"We never mean to feel old," said Miss Jane to me the other day, with sprightly coquetry. "I do think old people are generally so dreadful."

And dear Miss Jane, though the third of the bright quartet, is not a mere child in years by any means. She is—must be;—well—well—let that pass. Somebody said, "Women and music should never be dated." So we will not date the Misses Popkin, except by inference.

Ten years since, Miss Popkin, though still quite young—in feeling—wore a front, and had given up, so she said, all thoughts of matrimony. She and Miss Catherine and Miss Jane all meant to live three old maids together, and never to marry. For Essie they could not answer. She was the youngest of the flock, the junior by years of all: it would be wrong to bind her. Marriage they considered a mistake. Still, if Essie chose a gentleman possessed of nice tastes they would not ostracise her because she held different opinions to those at which they had arrived.

It will be inferred from this that Miss Essie was quite a young thing—of nine and thirty, or thereabouts—whom her sisters treated as a perfect baby, and whom they looked upon as scarcely fit to be trusted out alone.

In Willowsdale there was a gentleman whom they supposed to be distractedly in love with her, a Mr. Ancidell, who had been a great traveller, who had also, according to their ideas, seen everything there was to be seen on earth, but who, like many other great men, was shy, and required a certain amount of encouragement, which "poor dear Essie" was not sufficiently bold to give him.

Mr. Ancidell, who had faced many lions, and knew his way about the world and the world's drawing-rooms, and the fine ladies who adorn them, as well as most people, was supposed to be afflicted with an access of diffidence when he came into the presence of the fair Esther. Everyone in the parish knew, however, the Misses Popkin expected him to propose to her, and he was quite aware of this expectation himself.

"If she would only put the question plainly to me—that is, plainly in words," he said one day to the present writer, "I should know what to do."

"You like her very much?" was the hesitating interrogation.

"Very much indeed; and so I do them all." With which remark he went off, laughing.

A sad fellow! A graceless, unthankful scamp, to have such kindness shown him, so much hospitality given him!

If I do not describe the house, I cannot describe the Misses Popkin.

It was their own. A person could not be in their company five minutes without learning that fact.

A fair-sized house for a family of moderate means. The regulation drawing-room, the regulation dining-room, the necessary breakfast-room, and the little snuggerly—Miss Catherine, busy with her Dorcas accounts and charity garments, declared to be such a "perfect treasure;" eight bed-chambers, and the necessary "domestic offices." Not a bad house as regarded size, set sufficiently back from the road, and approached by a drive skirted on the one side by a tiny belt of plantation, and on the other skirting a grass-plot adorned with a fine larch, a weeping ash-tree, an evergreen oak, and a sun-dial.

Behind the house there was a flower-garden. To the left lay a paddock; to the right, stable-yard, coach-house, &c. At the back of these outbuildings the Misses Popkin informed all visitors they had a good acre of kitchen ground.

Not a bad little property, taken altogether. The maiden ladies were proud of it, and felt no shame in showing their pride.

The place was painfully trim; there was no stir of life or litter of use about it. No garden-roller was ever permitted to remain, when not in use, outside the tool-shed. No pigeons cooed and strutted along the roof of the empty stable. The fowls were relegated to a dreary run at the end of the paddock. There was not a weed in the garden or a scrap of moss on any walk about The Larches. An artist, if set down there, must have gone crazy, and anyone possessed of a taste for untidy comfort taken refuge in an old tumbledown barn standing in a field a little further down the road.

It was the same inside the house—line and plummet—mathematical accuracy. Miss Popkin's seat, Miss Catherine's chair, Miss Jane's footstool. You knew all these things, and kept clear of them as you entered the drawing-room. As for Miss Essie, she had, of course, her girlish accomplishments. She daubed in water colours and embroidered in wools, and sang a little and played a little; but she was tidy through all. Never a piece of music out of the canterbury, or a pattern lying on the table, or a drawing to be found, except on the case or in the portfolio.

"Order," said Miss Popkin, for the benefit of her niece "is Heaven's first law;" and I dare say Miss Popkin, as well as the individual who first made that remark, is in the main right.

Only the niece fell out of rank. She was not orderly.

"Oh! dear," Miss Catherine used to say, piteously. "What would your poor papa think if he could see you?" Ah! what indeed? For my own part, I don't think any papa need have desired to look upon a fairer picture.

I had known the Misses Popkin some six years when this niece came to live with them. I saw her a few days after her arrival, and found her a gaunt young creature, clad in dresses too short for her, hair closely cropped, possessed of timid manners, a grave face, and, as her aunts truly said, with "A great want of development about her."

She had been at school—a day-school—till her mother's death, and now, explained Miss Popkin, "she has not a creature in the world except ourselves. Some day, however, I suppose, she will be our brother's heiress, and we must see she keeps up her studies."

If the absent Mr. Popkin had been the Maharajah Duleep Sing we could not have been led to entertain higher ideas of his wealth than was the case.

When he returned, the stable was to be put in requisition, the house filled with guests, the Misses Popkin were to go on the Continent; they meant to take a house in town; and as by that time, which might have meant a year hence, or half a life time, Kitty would be almost grown up—who knew? More unlikely things than a presentation at Court had occurred to girls possessed of rich uncles?

During the whole of this period Mr. Ancidell had been going backwards and forwards to and from The Larches. Now he wanted to present a plant for the conservatory.

Again he was invited to view some of the contents of the latest box received from India. It was impossible to avoid thinking that Miss Essie Popkin grew livelier and brighter, and it was equally impossible for Willowsdale to remain blind to the fact that the eligible bachelor affected The Larches more and more.

True, there was a disparity, and that upon the wrong side; "but then," as Miss Popkin remarked, "dear Essie is so young in heart, that she will always remain a girl," whilst all the sisters declared "Mr. Ancidell is old both in appearance and manner—any one who did not know him intimately might imagine he was quite middle-aged."

Being unprotected females, and feeling that ladies so placed "could not be too particular," the Misses Popkin did not give dinner-parties—indeed, they did not give parties of any kind.

"When their brother returned," they hinted, Willowsdale might expect a reign of mad dissipation to set in at The Larches; but till that blest period arrived the most any friend could expect was a cup of tea or a glass of wine.

Mr. Ancidell partook of more cups of tea and glasses of wine than anyone else; and it was felt that, after a fashion, the Misses Popkin had bought him for Esther, and that if he refused to fulfil the bargain he would act shabbily towards them.

Apparently, the matter did not strike him in this light, for he continued to visit at The Larches, took all the cups of tea and slices of bread-and-butter the ladies offered him, drank a considerable amount of the very good sherry they decanted, and ate whole pounds of biscuits, and yet never proposed—no, though he sat in their drawing-room by the hour together and talked of his adventures by land and water, the while Miss Popkin knitted and Miss Catherine made up her comfortable garments for the poor, and Miss Jane embroidered and Miss Essie painted pictures, and that waif and stray Kitty let her work fall idly in her lap while she listened open-eyed to his stories of countries and people very far away.

"It was friendly, but it was not business," Miss Popkin no doubt felt this, for she decided it would be only wise to give him the opportunity he was evidently awaiting.

"We will ask him to dinner," said that astute lady, and Mr. Ancidell was asked to dinner accordingly, but, unhappily, nothing came of it.

Even Willowsdale had failed to learn whence the Misses Popkin derived their income. Except The Larches, no one ever heard them speak of property. The popular belief appeared to be that they had ten thousand pounds each in the Three per Cents; but I felt doubtful upon this point. Twice a year they went up to London, and Miss Jane slipped out on one occasion that they were going to get their dividends, because the time for that pleasing task had long been past.

They paid with the regularity of clock-work. So much for housekeeping, for taxes, for wages, for the church, for the poor, for dress, for that two weeks' outing turn in the year to London, and another fortnight's sojourn at some watering-place. Miss Popkin kept the accounts; Miss Jane managed domestic affairs; Miss Catherine attended to the poor; while Miss Essie, who was still too young to devote herself to matters which were merely useful, furnished the establishment with the lighter graces of existence.

As for Miss Kitty, you always met her where it seemed least likely the girl would be found. Swimming the retriever a few miles up the river, comforting some naughty child who had been getting into a scrape, dandling a disreputable-looking baby, remonstrating with the donkey-boys about their cruelty, or bribing the village lads not to stone the cats and pelt the frogs and kick the dogs.

I am quite satisfied the Misses Popkin had only the vaguest idea of their niece's proceedings. They would have fainted had they known one half of her doings.

When her aunts went to London she did not accompany them. A vague sort of promise was, indeed, given her that if she were a good girl some day she might be taken to the metropolis.

One hot afternoon I was pacing along the road which led past The Larches, when, in the paddock, I beheld the Misses Popkin's niece exercising that unfortunate retriever, who save when she unfastened his collar was always upon the chain.

I went up close to the fence and called her by name.

I can see her now hurrying across the field, coming laughing towards me.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Margison," she said, stretching out her gloveless hand. "Isn't it warm?" and she took off her hat and stood swinging it backwards and forwards while the sun shone down upon her through the leaves and branches of a great oak-tree.

I have said she was a fair picture; but no words could tell you how beautiful a girl I thought her.

"Some day you will break hearts," I considered often, as I looked at her. If mine had not been cleft in twain on the day I buried my young girl wife she must, old though I am, have hurt it sorely.

"All alone, Miss Kitty?" I said, for I had seen her aunts start for London when I was at the station that morning.

"All alone, Mr. Margison," she said, showing her dimples and her white even teeth. "The aunts went off to town by the eleven o'clock express."

"Yes, I know," I answered; "don't you feel lonely?"

"Not very," she said. "I shall this evening, perhaps."

"What are you going to do this evening?"

"I can't tell yet," she replied. Perhaps play, perhaps draw. If I feel industrious I may even do a little needle-work."

"Have you dined?"

"Hours ago," she answered.

"In that case, I wonder if you would come and take tea with me."

"I shall be delighted," she answered. "I am so much obliged to you for asking me."

"You don't think your aunts would object?" I ventured.

"Why should they?" she asked, gravely; but there was a twinkle in her eyes and a smile dimpling her face which contradicted the seriousness of her question. "I am so young, you know, Mr. Margison, that it does not matter much where I go."

Never before had it occurred to me that the peculiarities of the Misses Popkin appeared ludicrous to their niece; but her words, and her smile, and that twinkle made me feel vaguely doubtful and uneasy.

"If you were not so young," I said, "I should not have been so bold as to ask you."

"What a blessing it is to be a mere 'chit,'" she answered, still with the light dancing in her eyes. "What time shall I come? When shall you be ready for me, and may I—oh! may I pour out the tea?"

A man must have been of adamant to withstand her.

"Of course you shall do anything and everything you like," I said. "Will half-past six be too early for you?"

"No; you may expect to see me at half-past six, dressed in all my best. I can't tell you how much I shall like to come."

And she put her hand over the fence and squeezed mine,

and once again I thought that some day she would break hearts, and that it was very nice to be so old as I am!

Half-past six came, and with it Miss Kitty, in the white gown she wore on Sundays, with some soft lace round neck and hands, with heavy gold bracelets on her wrists, and a Venetian chain twisted into an ornament for her throat.

"They were mamma's," she said softly, seeing my eyes rest upon these adornments. "I thought I would put them on to do you honour."

How charming she made herself. How sweet she seemed walking, her hand within my arm, in the dim twilight, as we sauntered through the garden, odorous with the scent of the night flowers.

"How old, Mr. Margison, do you suppose I am?" she asked at last.

"About fifteen or sixteen," I replied.

She broke out laughing. "I am nearly twenty," she said. "Do not you think I might soon be allowed to wear long dresses and let my hair grow?"

What remark I should, or indeed could, have made in return may never now be recorded, because at this moment there came along one of the soft moss-covered walks a person—my housekeeper.

"If you please, Sir," she said, and I noticed her voice seemed a little unsteady, "Miss Popkins have come from London, and Miss Kitty is wanted back directly."

"Back already!" cried Miss Kitty, "nobody is ill, is there?"

"Not as I am aware of, Miss," answered Mrs. Hall, with grave propriety.

She had her hat on in a moment, and her little scarf around her shoulders.

"Good-by, dear Mr. Margison," she said, taking both my hands in hers. "How can I ever thank you sufficiently for this delightful evening?"

"I am going home with you," I answered, giving her my arm. "You have made yourself so charming, Miss Kitty, that I shall not part with you till I am compelled."

"Come in, Mr. Margison, pray," entreated Miss Kitty, as we stood under the sheltering porch. "My aunts are in the drawing-room, Mary, I suppose," she went on, addressing the trim maid who opened the door.

"No, Miss. They are up stairs—they have had news from their brother."

"From uncle?" repeated Kitty. "He is coming back then, no doubt; how delightful!"

"I do not think so," said Mary; and then, as the girl was about to pass her, she cried, "Oh, Miss Kitty, don't go up to them with that smiling face. My mistresses are in great trouble. The gentleman is dead!"

I was walking towards my house when I met Mr. Ancidell. "Heard the news?" he asked, after the first greetings were over.

"I told him that I had, and how sorry I felt for the Misses Popkin."

"Why, what is the matter with them? They have no money in the house, have they?"

We seemed to be playing a little at cross-purposes; but I merely said the Misses Popkins' was not a pecuniary trouble. "Their brother is dead," I added; "he died very suddenly."

"Then Miss Kitty will be an heiress immediately," he remarked, a little bitterly. "Mine is a bit of City news," he went on, immediately. "Hill and Jones, the great East India people, have gone for over a million of money, and people say there won't be twopence in the pound."

CHAPTER II.

TOLD BY MR. MARGISON.

It was six months after. I still walked about Willowsdale, and Mr. Ancidell also remained there, though he often talked of going back to Africa or of taking a tour through South America.

"I get dreadfully tired of this stupid place," he remarked, alluding, of course, to our village.

"You feel lost, no doubt, without the youngest Miss Popkin," I remarked.

He looked at me oddly for a minute, then said, "the fair Essie! that is it, no doubt. By-the-by, where are they now? Have you heard anything about them lately?"

I had; that very morning a letter reached me from Miss Popkin stating that she and her sisters desired either to sell The Larches or to let it on a long lease.

They did not think of returning to Willowsdale. For the present, their plans were somewhat uncertain. They might go abroad, or remain for the winter at the watering-place from which she dated; but they had no thought of again residing at The Larches.

"It would be painful for us now to do so," explained Miss Popkin; "the health of my second sister is far from good, and I do not feel very strong myself."

"Oh!" commented Mr. Ancidell. "Want to sever all connection with Willowsdale, evidently. I suppose that old Hindoo (such was his irreverent mode of speaking of the late respectable Mr. Popkin) left a pot of money behind him. Well, they need not have cut us so completely, no matter how rich they are. I am sure I never wanted any share of their wealth. And so you are to have the treat of getting The Larches off their hands for them, I suppose."

Yes, I said; I was to do the best I could for them, and arrange for an auction to take place shortly.

It was a blow to me, I confess. I had grown to like the Misses Popkin. They were very odd; but they suited my quiet, homely ways, and I once hoped I suited them.

Mr. Ancidell was very bitter about the estrangement which Mr. Popkin's death had caused.

"I wonder if they still think I want to marry the charming Miss Esther, and are keeping her out of my way?" he laughed. "I have a great mind to run down to that outlandish place Miss Popkin dated from, and call upon them." And shortly after he walked away.

Some weeks passed before I saw him again. I had arranged for the auction to take place almost immediately, when, quite unexpectedly, he came in one morning while I was at breakfast. He looked well—better than he had done for a long time past. He was in good spirits and health, and declared his trip had benefited him greatly.

"By-the-by," he said, after a little, "you may take down that notice about The Larches; the place is sold."

I looked at him incredulously. "Sold!" I repeated.

"And who has bought it, pray?"

"I have," he answered.

"You?" I uttered the word stupidly.

"Yes. I called upon Miss Popkin's solicitor as I came through London, and settled the matter with him. He promised to write to you."

"Why, what can you want with The Larches?" I asked.

"I thought you were so fond of The Cottage?"

"So I was, but it wouldn't be large enough for me now," he said. I looked at him again, and a sudden light flashed across me.

"You are going to be married," I guess.

He nodded. "Wish me joy!" he cried.

"I am sure I do, heartily," I returned; "but who is the lady?"

"Cannot you form any idea?"

"It is not Miss Popkin, is it?" I hesitated.

"Yes, it is Miss Popkin," and he laughed joyously. "Don't look so sorrowful, man," he added. "She will make me a very good wife; don't you think so?"

"I answered—I had no doubt of that. She was a very estimable person. The only thing—the only doubt"—

"Yes; go on," said Mr. Ancidell, encouragingly. "I shan't feel offended, no matter what you say."

"I was only going to mention the disparity in your ages; but if you do not mind, of course"—

"Oh! I don't mind; and she does not, either."

"I never supposed she would," I retorted, nettled; for his merriment struck me as unseemly. It did not appear possible he could have any affection for a woman so much older than himself, and it vexed me to think that, after all, he should marry for money. He had not even the excuse of being poor. His means were very good indeed.

He watched me for a few moments, his features twitching with amusement.

"Cheer up, Margison," he said, at last. "After all, it is not you who are going to marry her, and that reminds me you have not asked me which of the ladies has so far honoured me."

"There could only be one," I answered sulkily.

"There could only be one," he repeated after me.

"Why—" something in his face arrested Miss Esther's name on my lips. "You do not mean—" I gasped.

"Yes, I do; I do, indeed. Wish me joy, I am the happiest fellow in all the world. I fell in love with Kitty, I think, the first day I saw her, but I did not dare to say anything, as they made such a fuss about her expectations."

"What do they say to your carrying off the heiress now," I asked, somewhat nervously.

"My dear fellow—this in strict confidence—the uncle did not leave her anything, for the simple reason that every farthing he had was in Hill's house. There is no doubt the failure killed him, and that was what drove the Misses Popkin away from Willowsdale."

I know all about them now. Their father it appears, the original Popkin, was a tradesman in a county town. He made some money, and, being ambitious, gave his children good educations and pushed himself forward at elections, and so forth, till, somehow, he managed to get an appointment out in India for his one son and a commission for the other. He could not leave much behind him after doing all these things, so his daughters had to live as best they could upon a hundred a year.

"Then how did they get their money?" I asked.

"I am coming to that," he said.

"As William, the elder brother, you understand, got on in India, he began to allow them first fifty, then a hundred, then two hundred per annum, till the amount he sent over grew to three hundred every six months."

"And had these ladies nothing except what he gave them?"

"Nothing whatever, if we exclude The Larches, that they bought with the money left by their father. When the brother died they had but a hundred pounds of ready cash. They were obliged to part with their jewellery, and the morning I dropped down upon them a fortnight ago I found Kitty giving music lessons and preparing to devote herself to teaching for the remainder of her life. But her smile was as bright and saucy as ever when she said,

"I am glad to be able to do something for them—thankful—they were so good and kind to my poor mother, that if it were not a pleasure it would be my duty to work for them."

"Bravo! Miss Kitty!" I exclaimed. I was so delighted about all the good news Mr. Ancidell brought that after that outburst I stretched out my hand and shook his in happy silence.

"Who was Miss Kitty's mother?" I asked.

"A romantic girl of good family, who fell in love with Captain Popkin's handsome face. Her father renounced her— forbade any one to mention her name before him; and she must entirely have starved, for Captain Popkin left nothing but debts behind him, had not the Misses Popkin got help from their brother in India for her, and given her help themselves."

"And so you are going to buy The Larches," I remarked, after a pause.

"I have bought it," he answered.

"And do you mean to purchase the furniture?"

"I have purchased it," he said.

The Misses Popkin, then, will live in your cottage, I suppose," I suggested.

"No; the fact is, they are going to live with us."

"With you!" I repeated, stupefied. "Do you think you will like that arrangement?"

"It is Kitty's," he answered; "and I would not thwart it for the world. Besides, you know I was always very fond of the Misses Popkin!"

I felt glad—oh! very glad. Willowsdale had never seemed the same since those dear, delightful, ridiculous old ladies had left it.

Time will not permit me to tell about the marriage, and the breakfast, and the smiles of Miss Kitty and the tears of her aunts. I must hurry over the intervening period, and return to The Larches on Christmas Day, where I had been bidden to meet the bride and bridegroom returned from their honeymoon and Mrs. Ancidell's uncle and aunts.

The rooms were decked with greenery, and in the hall, more lovely than she had ever been, stood Kitty, with both hands outstretched to meet her old friend, laughing and crying, her face dimpled, but her eyes full of tears.

As for the Misses Popkin, how may I hope to describe them. In dress they were more gorgeous than ever, and at first I thought they were more stately, but this manner I soon found was only assumed to conceal their want of self-possession.

Before dinner Miss Popkin took me aside. "I want to tell you something about our darling. Her uncle has behaved to her with the greatest kindness—made over all the fortune which would have been his sister's had she married differently. And what—what do you think, Mrs. Margison? This morning she sent each of us a little note with an order that we were to receive yearly seventy-five pounds. With the money Mr. Ancidell paid us for this place we have therefore a hundred a year a piece so long as we live. We shall not need it, of course; but still—still"—

The poor lady broke down. The most genuine tears I ever saw shed were running down her cheeks.

"God bless Kitty!" I said, and I said it from the bottom of my heart.

"Who is talking about Kitty?" cried Mrs. Ancidell, coming forward at that moment.

"We were," answered her aunt. "I was just telling Mr. Margison about your thought for your old aunts; and we really—really must give up calling you Kitty any longer"—

"I hope I shall never be anything else to you," she interrupted, with a delightful smile. "John says he thinks it the prettiest name he ever heard, and uncle quite agrees with him."

COUSIN FRANK DISCOURSES ON THE MISTLETOE.

In an old manor house reside
Two girls, their widowed father's pride:
The elder, Joan, brimful of life,
While gentle Grace reflects his wife.
Each in her way is beauty's queen,
Though not in shops their photos seen,
Since these two maidens hold their reign
As woman should, in home's domain.

'Twas in the prime of Christmas-time,
One of those days known in our clime,
When frost and sunshine league together
To make the most delightful weather,
Constraining oft young folk to quit
The fireside where they shivering sit,
And take brisk walks, till rosiest hue
Mantles o'er cheek—and nose-tip, too:
On such a day these girls set forth,
Although the wind was in the north,
Upon a country ramble bent;
And as through fields and lanes they went
It happened—by mere accident—
The veriest chance, one may declare—
Their cousin Francis met them there,
Just where a veteran oak-tree spread
Its giant branches overhead.
So, after questions and replies,
Francis expressing his surprise,
And gladness too, at this chance meeting,
And being ended their warm greeting,
That slyboots, Master Frank, bethought him
(’Twas surely Love's own self that taught him)
How best he might some topic start
That touched the purpose of his heart:
For, in a whisper he it said,
One of those girls he fain would wed;
Though whether Joan or Grace it be
The rack should not extort from me.
There was some mention of the oak,
And straight upon that hint he spoke.

"Ah, cousins dear, do you remember
One evening in the last December
I read to you our Laureate's rhymes,
That ring like sweet bells' sweetest chimes,
In which an oak is made to tell
How Olive loved her Walter well?
The nymph was charming, I allow;
But girls as fair are living now.
The oak in Summer Chace was grand;
As noble this 'neath which we stand,
As wide outspread its sturdy boughs,
With shade as sweet for lovers' vows;
Besides, this is no talking-tree,
To blab what it might hear or see;
And then—O joy!—here clusters grow
Of pearl-bestudded mistletoe.

"What dainty shrub to effloresce
On this huge type of sturdiness!
Thou little plant, with starry eyes,
What marvellous virtue in thee lies!
When hung at Christmas-time to rafter,
Provocative of mirth and laughter;
Of lovers' scheming, stifled screaming,
Resistance sometimes only seeming—
For not all damsels take amiss
The sugar-plum which rhymes to bliss."

Then Frank most learnedly ran o'er
His varied store of Druid lore;
Told how the plant which oak-trees bore
To Druids mystic meaning wore,
Held sacred by those grim old priests,
And gracing all their solemn feasts;
Well harrowing his hearers' feelings
With his lugubrious revealings.
But, nowadays, Frank laughing said,
The plant to cheerier worship's wed,
And fair young priestesses now throw
Their glamour o'er the mistletoe.

Is that the chirrup of a bird
In the deep stillness that is heard?
Or does a sprig of mistletoe,
In love with those fair girls below,
Come toppling from its barren height
Upon their rosy lips to light?
Whatever one may think the cause,
There is in Frank's discourse a pause,
And more than health's most roseate hues
The maidens' cheeks straightway suffuse.
'Tis what Frank calls the application
Of his long sermon-like narration;
Nor do the girls seem greatly vexed
With his expounding of love's text.
But what the text, and how applied,
Is left for young folk to decide. JOHN LATEY.

"MAY I HAVE THE PLEASURE?"

Ah! these Regency beaux! with their graces elastic;
Their invincible manners, persuasive yet bold;
With The Sex (Heaven bless 'em!) how charmingly plastic!
What adepts at the practice of never being old!
Here is one who betrays in each confident twinkle,
The beau who remembers the hearts he has caged;
There's the air of the slayer in raiment and wrinkle,
'Tis a conqueror speaks in his

"Are you engaged?"

A conqueror—well? The sweet battle's not fought yet,
And that face wears the aspect (if eyes tell the truth)
Of a maiden undaunted who has not been caught yet,
And is not to be caught, by this well-preserved youth!
For, though 'tis a dance he solicits, so tender's
The voice she may fear a proposal's presaged
To the fair who her finger-tips lightly surrenders
When this beau so bewitching's asked

"Are you engaged?"

The rejoinder is Yes!—you preposterous creature!
So retire, lest she smite you in tones swift and sharp;
Retire, while becalmed is each beautiful feature,
Retire, and enrapture—flute, fiddle, and harp!
She is waiting for one who has No for his answer,
And, unless you would see that blithe suitor enraged,
Seek solace elsewhere, and—well, if you can't, Sir,
No solace you'll hear in his

"Are you engaged?" BYRON WEBBER.



MAY I HAVE THE PLEASURE?
DRAWN BY F. BARNARD.



BREAKERS AHEAD!
DRAWN BY L. SMYTHE.

MAJOR BLACK'S LOVE-LETTER.

BY DUTTON COOK.

Major Black had returned to his native land after an absence of many years' duration. He left England a smooth-faced, pink-cheeked boy, fresh from Addiscombe, a subaltern in the employment of John Company, who was Emperor of India in those days; he came back from the East a withered-looking, sun-dried, stiff-limbed gentleman of middle age and something more, a Major of Bengal Light Cavalry, who had seen active service in the field, who had suffered considerably from wear and tear, from the influences of time and climate. His complexion had now the look and the hue of old parchment; little wisps of iron-grey hair filled scantily the place once completely occupied by the most luxuriant of brown locks; a heavy moustache now sat astride upon the upper lip, which formerly had borne no burden of hair save of a very light and downy sort. Certainly, the Major was not handsome; yet was there something picturesque about his grave, lined, worn face; he had the air of a gentleman and of a soldier; and at times there was a tender, sympathetic expression in his grey eyes that was curiously winning.

He found himself alone in London. He was without kith or kin. It seemed to him that he belonged to a past generation; that the England he had known was not this present England to which he had journeyed. He had friends, comrades, and acquaintances left behind in India or acquired upon the voyage home. But the friends he had known of old and left behind him in England, the friends of his youth—well, they, it appeared, had gone with his youth, never to return. Over and over again he said to himself, as though he were repeating the burden of a song, "The streets to me are peopled with shadows; the city is as a city of the dead." It was a line from some book he had read a long while since. The words lingered in his memory, although he had forgotten all about the source whence they were derived. But in his present mood and condition they recurred to him as appropriate. "The streets to me are peopled with shadows; the city is as a city of the dead." And melancholy took possession of him.

"I've been away too long. I ought never to have returned. I am a mummy—a positive mummy," said the Major.

He was a member of a club instituted for the benefit of old East Indians returned to England for a holiday or for good. It was not so much a club, perhaps, as a hospital for invalids suffering from the effects of life and service in the East. There was much liver complaint in that club, with other disorders resulting from tropical experiences. The members boasted very bronzed complexions, and were exceedingly yellow as to the whites of their eyes. They ate of strange Indian dishes, that seemed from their colour to be composed in great part of gamboge; they were partial to rice dexterously boiled so that no adherence occurred amongst its grains. They were irascible of temper; they smoked cheroots. They called lunch "tiffin;" and cold brandy-and-water, a compound to which they were partial, "brandy pawnee." They were much interested in Indian news, but cared little for home politics. The British Government was to them a thing to be scorned, and even abominated. It had grievously neglected Oriental interests, and had in some way, not clearly to be stated or understood, irreparably wronged "the service" of which they were members and ornaments.

The Major spent many hours daily at his club—almost lived there, in fact, occupying at night a confined bed-chamber over a bootmaker's shop in Jermyn-street. "I had a room here when I was a cadet, before I went to India," he observed, adding, with an air of doubt, "at least, I think it was in this very same house." He could not be quite sure; it was so many years ago. "Indeed, Sir," said the landlady, not much interested, and not, of course, remembering him. How could she? She must have been quite a child when he was a cadet. And very likely it was not really the same house. "So many gentlemen have slept in this room from time to time. We're most always full in the season." Had he been trying to take up his life in London exactly where he left it off so many years back, before he went to India?

It was dull work. He sat at the club window reading the papers or gazing at the passers-by. He wandered about the club's spacious saloons; he was to be seen, but always sad and wearied-looking, now in the morning-room, now in the smoking-room, now in the library, now watching the billiard or the whist players. His life was very objectless. "I think I had best go back again," he said. "There was something to do in India, although it was but routine sort of work. But it suited me to feel myself in harness. I miss the barrack-yard and the life in camp, the tramping of hoofs and the clattering of sabres. Yet I so longed to get home to England! I caught the habit of longing from the other men who had good reason for longing to be at home again. I forgot that there existed no reason in my case. I had no friends or relations to get home to. There was no one here to care whether I came home or stayed in India. I think I had best go back again."

An only child, he had long years back lost his father. He had lately paid a pilgrimage to his mother's grave in the picturesque cemetery at Bath. The poor lady had survived but for a little while the departure from England of her much-loved boy. He had outlived all the uncles and aunts he had ever possessed. So far as he knew, he had no cousins in existence. Certainly he was very much alone.

But, of course, there were many old Indian officers of his own standing, members of the same club, to be encountered there very frequently. Military talk went on perpetually in the smoking-room, with much discussion of Oriental topics generally. Major Black could scarcely refrain from throwing in a word now and then, returned, as he was, so recently from the East, in possession of the latest information on the subjects in question. In such wise he established relations of an amicable character now with this veteran, and now with that. And an officer he had first met on his voyage home—on board the P. and O. Company's steamer Otranto, indeed—now returned to town from visiting his relatives in the west of England. This was Colonel Blake, an artillery officer of distinction, whose name had been well known to the Major long before chance made the two gentlemen personally acquainted. At sea they had enjoyed much discourse as they smoked their cheroots, leaning over the side, or paced the deck together, or reclined in easy-chairs, the awning above screening them from the sun-rays.

Colonel Blake was fiery of speech and crimson of face, with a round nose that shone like a knob of burnished copper, a ragged grey fringe of moustache straggling out beneath it. The Colonel, renewing his acquaintance with his native land, had formed the lowest opinion of it.

"By George, Sir! the country is going to the deuce (he pronounced it *juice*) as fast as it can go. They think of nothing now, Sir, in England but trade and money-grubbing. The City is now everywhere. There is a business element in everything. I confess that it's not at all the sort of thing that I've been accustomed to. By George, Sir, I was brought up with gentlemanly notions. I was always taught to hold myself aloof from the shop-keeping community. But what do we

now find, Sir? By George! the very Peerage has gone into trade. They tell me, Sir, that now in England you may buy your coats of a Duke, your game and fish of a Marquis, your wine of a Viscount! I am not sure, indeed, that you don't have an Earl or two calling every morning to know if you have any order for the butcher. As for the Bishops—the spiritual peers, as they are called—I can't say for certain, but I should not be at all surprised to find that they also have gone into business of some sort; the muffin and crumpet trade, very likely."

And the Colonel chuckled acridly and hoarsely over the decadence of his country's nobility. It transpired at a later date that the officer had met with severe disappointment during his visit to the west of England. A widow lady, whom he had fully designed to marry, and who had certainly afforded some encouragement to his suit, had at the last moment expressed her preference for another lover, who had acquired extraordinary wealth in the coal-trade; and thereupon the Colonel had been promptly dismissed. "By George, Sir!" he exclaimed, when he came afterwards to relate the ill-treatment he had undergone, "to think that a man of my standing should have been cut out by a mere coal-heaver! What is the country coming to?" His gloomy views had their warrant in his own sombre experiences.

They agreed that the England they had come back to was a much colder England than the England they had quitted in their youth. There had been a great change for the worse as to its climate. And there was talk of another sort between the veterans. They inquired of each other concerning their common friends. What had become of Hopkins of the 15th? Had anything been heard of Fosbrook of the 50th? How about Bamby of the Irregular Horse? And Granby, George Granby, not William—he was in the Cape Rifles—George Granby, you know, great friend of poor Tom Osborne, who died at Delhi—where was George Granby? Well, George Granby was dead, too—of dysentery, at Cairo, on his way home to England. Poor old George Granby! Poor old Tom Osborne!

The soldiers lighted their final cheroots and strolled from their club, retreating towards their bachelor beds. The Colonel also occupied a room in Jermyn-street, but not over the Major's boot-shop. The Colonel was lodged at a stationer's a few doors off, immediately beneath the shadow of St. James's Church.

Major Black could not sleep that night. Not because of the confined dimensions of his room or by reason of the powerful odour of boot-leather and blacking that pervaded the premises; but that a train of recollections had been fired within him, and his mind was in a very disturbed, and, indeed, explosive state in consequence.

Tom Osborne. He had died, leaving behind him a tiny child—Rosy Osborne she was called—a sweet little English baby-girl, with soft white-rose transparent complexion, sky-blue eyes, and coral-red lips. She had been the pet of the whole station. The Major had promised himself, and promised her father, in the case of any calamity befalling him, always to befriend little Rosy Osborne, and to be, so far as he could, a second father to her.

But that was years ago. The little maiden had been carried away from India to England, as English children usually are carried away, for health's sake, on emerging from their earlier years; and the Major had stayed behind, bound by his military duties. He had seen her no more; for a long time he had heard nothing of her. Time had slipped away with fatal imperceptibility. Almost, the Major had forgotten the very existence of Rosy Osborne.

Now he resolved that he would find her out. Some clue he possessed in certain letters and papers stored away in a corner of his desk. At least he knew where English relatives of hers might be looked for. He would seek out poor Tom Osborne's daughter and serve and befriend her if he might. He had secured something to do at last. His life was now a little less objectless than it had seemed to him for some time past.

A pretty English garden, neatly folded round by a tall, dense, closely-clipped box hedge; a smooth carpet of green velvet lawn, with here and there a standard rose-tree showering at every breath of wind its scented leaves at its feet; an old country house, pleasantly variegated as to colour, from the many patches of moss and lichen and the partial coat of dark, satin-leaved ivy clothing its red walls; a background of thick woodland, and beyond a grand range of breezy downs. Summerleas the place was called. A village nestled in a hollow close by; a little group of white-faced cottages with thatched roofs, a tiny inn with an ill-painted sign, a general shop, a blacksmith's forge, a post-office, and a diminutive cruciform church of grey stone, with a square, squat tower, loopholed and battlemented like a fortress.

Miss Rose Osborne stepped from a conservatory that adjoined the drawing-room of the old red brick house, and found herself face to face with Mr. MacGillebray, the gardener, a tyrant in his way and in his own province, as gardeners are apt to be.

"Now, dontee rob the greenhouse—dontee, now, Miss Rose. But you gentlefolks has no mercy. You think a flower's a thing may be snipped off anyhow, and made waste with—given to the first comer. You can't understand what a gardener's feelings are. You don't know what it is to go to bed with potting-out and late frosts on your mind. Sometimes I can't get so much as a wink of sleep o' nights for the new pelargoniums weighing so heavy on my chest. A bud d'ye want? Blessie, I'd sooner give you a flower that was full blown and tumbling to pieces. Well, you shall have a bud, and a pretty one; only promise never to take one without asking old MacGillebray's permission first. A flower! The old man continued, with a sort of polite garrulosity. "I do declare there's ne'er a prettier flower in the whole garden, no, nor for miles round, than my Miss Rose. With such roses and lilies in your face, and sunshine in your smile, as is a'most enough to ripen the grapes afore their time. Only dontee give yourself away like a poor cut flower, to be stuck in anybody's button-hole. Why, there's a blush! Like a bed of damask roses in June, I do declare. Ah, them as christened you did right to call you Miss Rose! For a rose you are, in very truth."

Now, Major Black was looking over the trim box hedge, and he was quite of the old gardener's opinion, that there wasn't a prettier flower in the garden, no, nor for miles round, than Miss Rose Osborne.

"It was quite worth while coming home," he said, "if it was only to see that sweet English rose." And straightway the Major fell in love, with all the impetuosity of age. For it is youth that deliberates and calculates in such cases; having to relinquish exceeding love for itself before it can devote its love to another object absolutely.

Major Black was welcomed to Summerleas. It was sufficient that he had stated himself to be the friend of the late Captain Osborne; but the Major, by way of voucher for his integrity, produced a packet of letters of long ago, the paper now frayed and faded, the black ink turned to dull brown, addressed to him by his departed friend. Summerleas was occupied by

Miss Sarah Osborne, the maiden aunt of Rose. Miss Osborne the elder was in delicate health; she had adopted her niece, was sincerely attached to her. Rose was, indeed, as her daughter, and a very devoted daughter.

The Major's visits to Summerleas became frequent. The railway was so convenient, he said. He could breakfast at his club, munch his usual dry toast, tap his accustomed egg, read through his morning paper, and yet be in time almost for luncheon at Summerleas. And the oftener he went to Summerleas, and the longer he stayed there, so much the more did he find himself in love with Miss Rose Osborne.

She was very beautiful. The Major declared that he had never seen anyone so beautiful; and he had seen many men, women, and cities; he had lived many years and travelled very far; so his evidence might be accounted as of some value. He delighted to note the lustre of her eyes, the witchery of her smile, the loveliness of her colour, the exquisite grace of her every movement. He became her constant knight—her most abject slave. He idolised her; he followed her about like a faithful dog. It was joy to him to sit at her feet worshipping her, or to be near her when she played or sang. With eyes of tenderest admiration he watched her soft, delicate hands fluttering like white birds about the keys of the piano. He seemed quite rapt when she sang. It was clear to him that he had never listened to a voice more exquisitely musical, or to melodies of more graceful or affecting quality.

It was in vain he avowed to himself the conviction that he was an old fool—that he had no sort of business to be in love—that it was really hardly becoming a man of his mature years—that he was old enough to be Rose's father—that it was altogether a great deal too absurd—and so on. Arguments of that kind are never of much avail in the way of remedying the quotidian of love.

He was very happy at Summerleas; he was very miserable in London, away from Rose. It was true, as he frankly conceded, that he was mad at Summerleas; whereas he was comparatively sane in London. But is there not, as the poet has told us, a pleasure in being mad which only madmen know? He had sought an object in life; well, he had found one now—with a vengeance—in love.

But while his love was most absorbing and supreme, he was, nevertheless, one of the most timid of lovers. He would far sooner have charged a battery, or have faced the most murderous fire of the enemy, than have made a formal proposal to Rose to become his wife. He thought very modestly of his own merits. She was so young and so fair; he was, as he assured himself over and over again, so old and ugly. It was true that he possessed some fortune; he had saved money, and of late years his pay had been more than adequate. His wants, indeed, were few and simple, and, though by no means inclined to parsimony, still his habits were of an inexpensive sort. Rose Osborne was portionless.

Major Black, like Alexander,

Gazed on the fair,
Who caused his care,
And sighed and looked, sighed and looked,
Sighed and looked, and sighed again.

But he could not bring himself to speak of his love. He was as a traveller in Alpine regions—he dreaded to whisper even, lest he should bring down upon himself an avalanche of disappointment.

Ah! if he had but known. The course of true love was running smooth enough—if he had but possessed the wit to perceive the fact. Rose loved him.

It is a bad compliment to pay him, but really there was no one else for her to love in the neighbourhood of Summerleas. There was a curate, of course—there is always a curate in the country; but this curate was a married man, and, as often happens with the married clergy, blessed with numerous offspring. And there was a medical man—a septuagenarian. These were almost the only males for miles round. Of course, it was no use reckoning the small farmers, broad of face and of dialect, who were but little removed above the class of labourers. Rose could scarcely find among these some one to love.

Even if there had been other and eligible suitors about her, however, it is quite possible that Rose would have preferred the Major. She was a soldier's daughter, and she cherished a sort of romantic regard for the profession of arms—and for its followers. She was much interested in the Major, who had been the firm friend of her departed father, who was brave and worthy in every respect, who had fought and bled for his country—and for the Honourable East India Company. She looked at him as something of a Bayard, and she really thought his battered, bronzed old face, with its heavy grey moustaches, deep hollows, and wrinkles, quite handsome. "Don't you think so, aunt?" she said, appealing to Miss Sarah Osborne.

"Well, no, Rose, dear, I should not say 'handsome,' exactly," the elder lady replied, ingenuously; "but certainly gentlemanly-looking and interesting—oh, dear, yes!—and a fine figure, if just a little stiff at the joints; but that's scarcely noticeable. Your poor dear father was just as flat in the back as the Major."

The two ladies liked to see the tall, gaunt, military figure of the Major striding and stalking about the trim garden of Summerleas. But he was wholly unconscious of the fact. Indeed, he was growing day by day more and more miserable. The secret love within him seemed like a serpent warmed into cruel liveliness, and playing its teeth greedily. And now Rose Osborne was about to quit Summerleas for some months, to pay a long-promised long visit to friends in the North of England. It was clear that for the while Rose and the Major must part. Should she see him when she returned to Summerleas? she asked.

Yes; he hoped so. But he did not speak or look very hopefully.

He would not be gone back to India?

He thought not. He was not quite sure. But he thought not.

She gave him her hand. He pressed it to his lips and sighed. She blushed and cast down her eyes. He should have spoken then, if ever, of his love. But he said only, "Good-bye, Miss Rose."

"Good-bye, Major Black." They shook hands and separated.

The Major returned to London promptly. In his despair, he determined upon resumption of his military duties in India. With this view he attended a levée at the Horse Guards. He was honoured by an interview with a very important martial functionary. It was understood that his departure was to be immediate.

He was braver away from Rose than when in her presence. He had been unable to speak to her; but it seemed to him that he could write to her. So he sat down to his desk—to find that the task he had set himself was not nearly so easy of accomplishment as he had imagined. How hard it was to hit on expressions of the right kind, to choose appropriate words, to turn his phrases neatly! He destroyed many sheets of paper; he began the letter afresh many times. He wrote with his room full of trunks, strewn with evidences of imminent departure and travel. And now the floor was littered with

fragmentary beginnings and rough incomplete draughts of his love-letter.

It was finished at last, he hardly knew how. Something he had said, he did not quite know what, but it seemed to convey his meaning, if not so completely as he could have wished. But at any rate he had told her of his love; he had assured her of his devotion to her; he had asked her to become his wife. And then he went on to speak of the agony suspense would inflict upon him. Might he ask for an immediate answer? Time was very short with him; he was on the eve of departure. Would she telegraph reply? One word would suffice—the word “Yes.” Might he hope to receive such a telegram from his beloved Rose in reply to his suit? His head ached; his hand shook; he felt parched and feverish. He was suffering from exhaustion both of body and mind; from excitement of brain and irritation of nerve. It seemed to him that he was losing direct command of his consciousness; that he was subsiding into a state of trance. That he was doing this and that, moving to and from, more like a somnambulist or a man in a dream than a wakeful and acute middle-aged and grey-haired Major of Bengal light cavalry.

The letter completed, the Major breathed more freely. He was as one who had done a desperate deed, over which he had long meditated painfully. It was done now and the consequences might be serious; but in any case he was spared the pain of further meditation on the subject. He had only now to wait the issue as patiently as he could; which was rather impatiently altogether.

He engaged in much mental arithmetic. He set himself long sums. He tried to calculate the exact time it would take to bring him an answer from Rose. She would receive his letter at such an hour; how long would she be before she made up her mind?—how long before she dispatched the telegram “Yes”? For he decided that if there was to be a telegram at all it would contain the word “Yes.” Otherwise she would write by post.

The Major waited at home all day long. Frequently he looked from his window hoping to see approach a telegraph-boy playing the part of Cupid and bringing a favourable answer to his suit—the telegram “Yes.” No such boy appeared, however. It was growing serious. But at any rate the post of the next morning would bring a letter.

It did not, however. The Major waited and waited. No telegraph-boy arrived with a telegram. No postman brought a letter. An expression of blank despair took up permanent abode upon the Major's face. Still he waited. He even deferred his departure. He would go, he decided, by the steamer from Marseilles instead of the steamer from Southampton.

He did not write again to Miss Rose Osborne, however. He was too proud for that.

At last—there was no help for it—his trunks were piled upon a cab; he paid his bills at his lodgings; he bade adieu to London. He was driven to the station of the South-Eastern Railway Company. He journeyed to Dover en route for India *via* Marseilles.

He remained in India five years.

He was a miserable man the while. He had no news of Rose Osborne. He did not write to her; no letter came from her. His love affair—the romance of his life—seemed to have terminated abruptly, to have become suddenly shrouded in an impenetrable mystery. Often and often he asked himself why Rose had not replied to his love-letter?

Had there been any mistake? As he knew, mistakes must happen at times. Suppose she had sent a telegram, and suppose there had been error in the address, or inadvertence on the part of the telegraph-boy; and suppose the telegram had been delivered not to Major Black, but to Colonel Blake, at his lodgings, a little lower down in Jermyn-street! It was absurd, perhaps; yet there was an element of reason in the notion. There was nothing impossible about it; and really it afforded an explanation, after a fashion, of a circumstance that was otherwise inexplicable.

But the Major could not resist a grim and desperate laugh—a gaunt sort of mirth not wholly inconsistent with his condition of gloom and despondency—as he pictured to himself his red-nosed friend, Colonel Blake of the Artillery, musing over the telegram “Yes,” and wondering what on earth it signified! What question had he asked of anyone to which this was the proper answer? How strangely perplexed he would be! What if he should imagine that the widow lady in the West of England had reconsidered her decision, and had rejected the gentleman who so prospered in the coal trade in favour of him, her military suitor, Colonel Blake!

But the Major (by-the-way he had now attained the rank of Colonel) could not permit himself much lively and fanciful entertainment of this kind. As a rule, his mood was one of exceeding depression. He was very weary of India. He was sick of the service. He yearned to be in England again. And he had a reason for this yearning. He should not return home again without an object. He wanted to know about Rose.

Presently he had turned his back upon India for ever. He had quitted the service. His name appeared upon the list of retired Colonels. He was again in London, and he was inquiring if he could resume occupation of his room over the bootmaker's. This time the landlady recognised him, although he was now but the ghost of his former self, he was so thin and bent, and his moustache and his side tufts of hair were quite white.

“Dear me, Sir!” she said, “and to think of your calling to-day, of all days in the week! Why, it was only this morning I was turning over those papers you left behind you, as the girl wanted to light the fires with; but I wouldn't let her, knowing that gentlemen's particular about their papers and such like being burned, and feeling certain as you'd come back to your room again when you was next in England, Sir. You see, I know gentlemen's ways, as I did ought to, having let lodgings to them now for so many years. And I'm glad to see you back again, I'm sure, Major Black—heartily glad.”

“Yes; but papers—what papers?”

“Well, Sir, I thought it best to take care of them, for when you come to gentlemen's papers there's never any knowing for certain when they're of value and when they ain't. Letters and bits of letters they seemed to be, but I'm not very clever at reading handwriting. But one of them I remember looked for all the world like a love-letter.”

“A love-letter!” cried Major Black.

“Yes, Sir, a love-letter or an offer of marriage, I won't be quite sure which, and, of course, they ain't quite the same thing, though sometimes they may seem like it.”

Presently she handed him a little soiled crumpled packet. He opened it with fingers that would tremble though he tried hard to prevent them. And then he uttered a strange cry. Among many odd scraps and fragments and rough draughts of his love-letter to Rose Osborne, he found the love-letter itself which should have been in her hands five years before; but somehow, as it seemed, had never left the lodging-house in Jermyn-street.

Colonel Black was looking over the neat box hedge encompassing the garden at Summerleas. But he did not see

Rose this time, nor MacGillebray the gardener. His eyes rested upon a board announcing that the house was to be Let or Sold. And then he perceived that the place was deserted—the window-shutters were closed—the garden was in a neglected state—the house was empty.

He learned upon inquiry in the village that Miss Sarah Osborne had been dead some three years; that Miss Rose Osborne had gone away, none knew whither.

It is necessary to be brief now. Colonel Black's search for Rose may not be fully related.

He found her at last. She was unmarried. That part of the discovery was a prodigious relief to him. She was a governess in the family of a wealthy manufacturer in the north of England. Through a pane of glass, the Colonel peered into the school-room and found Rose, pale and thin and saddened, and somewhat suffering, yet, as he avowed, more beautiful than ever, teaching French to three little girls with flaxen heads and rather red noses.

“Rose!” he said, in a low voice, as he softly opened the window.

“Yes!” she answered. He had waited six years to hear that word!

“Rosé! My Rose!”

She recognised him instantly, but her face was very white, and there was a frightened look in her eyes as she advanced to meet him.

“At last!” she murmured. And then but for his aid she would have fallen. He held her tightly in his arms, however.

“My poor child!” he said. “Forgive me and pity me. People say there's no fool like an old fool; and, faith, I think they're right. You must have thought me very unkind, cruel, heartless.”

“If you had only written a line, Major Black, I think I could have borne it better.”

“I did write, Rose; that is what I want to tell you.”

“I received this—only this—five years ago!” She took from her bosom an envelope addressed to her at Summerleas. Colonel Black's handwriting appeared upon the envelope, but it contained—a blank sheet of paper only!

“I know—I know!” he said desperately. “Some cruel fatality has been at work! I was mad, I think, my dear; I was fairly beside myself; but it was because of my great love for you, Rose. It turned my brain. This letter should have gone in the envelope.” He produced the missing letter. “But somehow—I cannot explain it, for I cannot understand it—it did not get into the envelope, or it slipped out again. But see there, it's in the envelope now, and it has safely reached your hands at last. Better late than never. Read it, Rose, dearest. I know little enough about love-letters; but it tells you—what I now tell you by word of mouth on my knees, Rose—that I love you with all my heart and soul, and that I implore you to be mine!”

If he had but spoken instead of writing five years before, or if he had been but a little more careful in dispatching his love-letter! But then the perturbation of his feelings! The intensity of his love! What wonder that he lost his senses. But—“All's well that ends well!” he murmured, as he clasped his Rose Osborne to his heart.

He found himself forgiven, and fondly loved. Soon he was to make the further discovery that he was the supremely happy husband of an adorable wife.

Yet very often the Colonel was tempted to repine. “It was a cruel, cruel thing,” he said; “especially when my age is borne in mind. I was simply cheated, or I cheated myself, out of five years of happiness. I can never recover those five lost years.”

His wife demanded: “May it not be, dearest, that we are the happier now because of our five years of doubt and suspense and despair? We were serving an apprenticeship!”

The Colonel said something about his being too old to serve an apprenticeship, and then dropped the subject. He had to be busy in the cellar, indeed. For his old friend, Colonel Blake, of the Artillery—still a bachelor, and with a nose redder than ever—was coming to dinner.

MY FIRST AND LAST PROPOSALS.

MY FIRST PROPOSAL.

Fifty years ago. Could I have dreamed then that—

But I must not anticipate. That is to say, I must go back, trudge back, the long, long high road to the very first stage, when I see little Tom Brindley, a fine lad—he was always thus complimented—on the eve of going to school, at the age of ten. Tom was the son of a great man who had made money in the iron way—and by the iron Ways—not a merchant prince, but a sort of merchant lord, and as proud as if he were a real prince. My father—for I am Tom Brindley—had a large family of boys and girls, and we all “played about” in beautiful grounds, and had each a pony, with masters and governesses, and lived in the lap of luxury among graperies and hot-houses. We were great people indeed. That is if the root of all evil sprouts up into greatness. And the time that Tom was to go to school—to, of course, the greatest school that money could secure—had now arrived.

I was in terrible trouble. For long I had known that the blow was impending, that the step was being talked of by Government in councils. But I did not think it was so near. One day it—the stroke—came, short and sharp; my father announcing in his decisive way, “Tom, Sir, you must go to Eton on the tenth.” Just a fortnight. O the misery, the blankness, the chill at my heart! To come at such a moment, when my fair hopes were in the ear! And all my happiness—But once more I am anticipating. Our modest little village church, to which we repaired on Sundays in state—Government in a brougham and pair, the family in a large waggone—was served by the Rev. Mr. Pearkes, the Curate, the Rector being in bad health and living abroad; where, indeed, he was soon expected to die. It would be unbecoming to say *hoped*, but I fear such was the fact. Mr. Pearkes supported an immense family, on the usual stipend, and it was understood, was to succeed. He was a dreamy, poetical being, who liked fishing and did not look sad or whine over his difficulties. He had a daughter, of my own age, and—Here I must pause.

Of all the entanglements that hamper life, nothing, it will be admitted, can compare for embarrassment with those for which the other sex is responsible. How many wretched shipwrecks may be set down to this—when the navigator, even with foreknowledge, and what sailors term a wide berth before him, declines to keep his course clear and *will* run on certain destruction!

Here was I, now, a clever boy, as I was told often, with the world opening before me, about to be made a man of, consumed with the most hopeless passion that ever preyed on the vitals of boyhood.

Abigail was her name—a plump, rosy little nymph, whom I have seen dispose of a plate of bread-and-butter in masterly style; nay, in a most bewitching way plead for a slice of mine in addition. That made no difference. Every one in the parish knew that I adored her, except, I suppose, my father,

who was too busy with his iron to notice such a trifle. Often used I to make my way down to the Rectory, and as we were both fond of mystery, we rarely met but by *appointment*, in a concealed and remote part of the garden, where there was a delightful swing. A swing was considered too vulgar for opulent children such as we were at Brindley. Seated side by side, and somewhat squeezed (but we found no objection to that), we spent such happy hours! The time flew by, until, as before explained, the bolt fell, and we were reduced to the lowest pitch of human wretchedness. I was, at last.

Shall I ever forget that evening when, in the swing, I told her that I *madly* loved her; that we must not be parted; and that we must—well, *do something*! “O! but didn't you,” she cried, without being so much agitated as I had expected, “hear the news? O! such delightful, good news!” The old Rector's dead at last, and papa and all of us are going to be so happy! Old Mr. Brindley is to give him the place, and I am to have a new dress, and there's to be—such fun!”

Well, I had hoped for a little more tragic sympathy. But “it was her nature to.” I saw that all lay upon me, me the man! And that I must up and do. And do quickly if I did at all.

I went straight to Mr. Pearkes and told him that “I loved his daughter.” He was reading poetry at the time. He was a man that was never surprised. “But,” said he gravely, “you are both too young—are you not?” he added, in a hesitating way. But I told him we could wait—wait for years, if necessary (which it was), while I was at school. That he might speak to my father. We could be engaged. Her education would be going on with mine. “O, dear Sir, it *must* be.” “Very well,” said Mr. Pearkes. “Really, now, I give you my word, I did not think there was so much poetry left in the world. By-the-way, I have to go to Mr. Brindley about the Living, and I could mention it—eh?”

“Do, do, my dear Sir; the very thing. We will wait for you here.”

Mr. Pearkes, singing a love song himself, got his hat and stick and walked gaily off to Brindley. We went into the garden and got into the swing once more, and swung ourselves up into the seventh heaven, the little lady being gradually worked into a sort of delightful anticipation of the joys of being “engaged.” So we swung and swung on.

We waited long.

The result may be summarised. The next morning at day-break I was “packed off”—the very words used by Mr. Brindley—to school, and within three weeks the swing in the Rectory Garden was being used by new children—i.e., children of a new Rector. Alas! Poor Mr. Pearkes!—his poetry, his long family, and the bewitching little Abigail had been “packed off” too. Curacy, all, was lost.

MY LAST PROPOSAL.

That was fifty years ago. Could I have dreamed then—

I may now anticipate. But for Mrs. Hawkins I certainly should never have recovered. Her tender interest, her unwearying solicitude, and never-flagging watchfulness “pulled me through,” as it is called. That day, near the Beachside Hotel, when I was run over by the mail Phaeton and carried insensible into the hotel, had nearly proved my death. And, on recovering, it was my worthy physician, who, on receiving about his fortieth fee, declared to me solemnly, “Under Providence, my dear Sir, you owe your recovery to Mrs. Hawkins and her watchful care.”

Though not knowing this literally, I had been conscious of it all the time. A buxom widow lady staying at the hotel—so the friendly doctor told me—had seen the poor shattered gentleman carried in, and had asked had he no friends or relations to be written to? Naturally, they could tell nothing; nor could he, for other reasons.

Alas! the great Brindley, my father, had long since passed away, having been ruined first, his children dispersed—dead, or struggling in far-off colonies—and the bold Tom Brindley, having gone into a dashing Hussar regiment, had been forced, when the crash came, to pass into a foot regiment and, after serving abroad many years, to retire on half pay. This had not been a cheerful life for Tom; and when Tom met this accident he felt literally that he was alone in the world.

But how strange! Fifty years ago? Could I have dreamed, then, the words with which I commenced this story. But hear Mrs. Hawkins herself, presently, that is.

“How shall I ever repay you?” I said, as I sat leaning on my stick. “You have snatched me from death.”

“By getting well,” she said, as she smiled. Her rather plain face looked as handsome as good nature can make a face look. “You must go to the sea, take plenty of exercise, the doctor says.”

I laughed. “That I can't do, if I were, as the vulgar say, to swing for it.”

She looked at me steadily.

“And that is not so bad a form of exercise.”

“What?”

“The swing. Did you ever try it when a boy?”

There was something strange in that face—a kind of softening of the lines, much like the quivering that takes place in dissolving views.

“Good gracious!” I exclaimed. “What is your name? What was it?”

“Strange that you never asked even my Christian name all this time. It is Abigail—the Abigail that once sat in the swing with you, and that”—

“I caused, by my folly, to be cast out on the world, ruined. O, I see it now!”

“Not so bad as that,” she said, smiling; “and so you recollect the swing?”

Then I made my last Proposal. PERCY FITZGERALD.

CHRISTMAS WAITS IN THE OLDEN TIME.

Here is a trio of old English minstrels, with their hautboy, fiddle, and bagpipe, striking up a tune of strain beneath the lighted window of a comfortable mansion, the dwelling of some gentlefolk, as shown by the sculptured crest on the wall. It puts us back into the fifteenth century, to reckon from their fashion of dress, and that will do pretty well for “the olden time.” There is a diversity of opinions concerning the origin and first meaning of the title “waits.” Dr. Busby holds that this word is a corruption of “wayghtes”—that is to say, hautboys or recorders, the pleasing little wind-instrument commonly used by the leader of the band, who was often merely accompanied by a harp or a fiddle. It is not unlikely that the plural name of the instrument, “wayghtes,” having no singular form, would come to be transferred to the company of performers. On the other hand, from Rymer's “Fœdera,” we learn that in the King's Court there were certain musical watchmen, whose duty was “to pipe the watch” every night; three times a night in the summer, four times a night between Michaelmas and Shrove Tuesday; and on Christmas Eve they would furnish the music of a sacred carol.



THE WAITS IN THE OLDEN TIME.
DRAWN BY H. S. MARKS, R.A.



THE OLD MILL ON THE MARSH.
DRAWN BY S. READ.

THE OLD MILL ON THE MARSH.

BY W. W. FENN.

A rough account of the adventure which I am about to narrate was partly written down by me soon after it happened, now a long time ago, and it is a strange fact that at the end of all these years I should be stirred to put it into shape and finish it by seeing my friend Mr. Samuel Read's drawing of "The Old Mill on the Marsh," at the Black and White Exhibition last summer; but such is the case, for the still stranger fact is that the picture so exactly represents the dreary aspect of the scene and the general look of the mill on that wild autumn evening that one can hardly think the circumstance a mere coincidence; had I been the artist, and equally skilled, I might have made the sketch as it stands on the spot. Coincidence only it can be, nevertheless, even to the light in the window of the little tumble-down house, which must thus have shone during part of the time I spent there.

Out for an autumn holiday, I was wandering late one wet and windy afternoon along a certain lonely road in the Eastern Counties when I first came in sight of this solitary mill. It did not appear to be very distant from the highway, and, having a queer, dreamy predilection for poking my nose into strange and unusual places, I was naturally induced to bend my steps towards this quaint, picturesque, tumble-down structure. Only, after trudging along for a quarter of a mile or so, the narrow track or cartway, which turned out of the main road towards the mill, did I begin to discover that it was very much farther off than I supposed. The heavy rain which had been falling all the morning had made the stretch of flat and dreary marsh across which I was going a complete swamp in many places. More than once I missed the road in the mire, and got half-way up to my knees in bog; but I cared nothing for that sort of thing in those days. I rather gloried in it, and was never put off my propensity for exploring by trifles.

When within a few hundred yards of my bourne, I halted to enjoy the wild, weird, solitude of the scene, which was in thorough harmony with my mood. Not a living creature was in sight—not another building or human habitation. The wind-riven clouds in the west were fringed with an angry light from the declining sun, and the chilly blast moaned dolefully as it swept through the sails and rigging of the mill (which was at rest) and round the ramshackle dwelling-house attached to it. There was no evidence either of life, any more inside the place than out of it, for I pushed on to the half-open door of the cottage and looked in. It seemed utterly deserted. Closer inspection, however, showed that it had been lately inhabited, poor and miserable as the kitchen or sort of house-place looked in the dimness of the now fast-increasing twilight. I wandered all round the mill, peeped in upon the conglomeration of wheels, cranks, and ladders, returned to the door of the cottage, peeped in there again, wandered round the whole affair once more, still saw no one, regretted there was no time to make a sketch, and finally turned my face towards the track of swampy road by which I had come. Immediately I did so, I saw I was in a fix; it was nearly dark, and now that I looked away from where the sun had gone down, I could scarcely distinguish earth from sky. In two minutes I had missed the road, and was up to my knees in bog; but, struggling back, and regaining the way, I trudged on for fifty yards, it might be, fairly well. Suddenly I was floundering once more in the swamp, and now sinking deeper and deeper. I knew enough of the dangers of marsh and fen to make me aware that this was no joke; in fact, I had a squeak for it, and I might in another moment have been irretrievably swallowed up by the treacherous bog. But I got out of it somehow, returned to the cottage, and determined that nothing should tempt me away from it without a guide and a lantern. So, rapping loudly at the door and shouting at the top of my voice, I listened. There was not a sound save the rising and falling of the melancholy wind. Clearly there was no one within hail. Walking boldly into the room I called aloud once more; still, all was silent.

To cut short this part of my story, I determined, after much deliberation, to stay where I was, come what might, till some one, or daylight, appeared. To attempt to find my way back was a sheer impossibility. I struck a match, found a half-burned candle on the smoky mantle-shelf, lighted it and looked about. A miserable hole, truly, to spend the night in! But there seemed nothing else for it.

At the farther end of the apartment were a truckle bed and some old dilapidated bits of furniture. Near the fire-place, which was close to the window, was a high-backed and cushioned settle, and on this at last I stretched myself at full length, determining to fill up the dreary waiting, if I could, with a nap, for I was very tired.

Letting the meagre candle gutter and burn out in its socket, I was presently in total darkness and fast asleep. I fancy I slept some hours, and that it was nearly midnight when I was aroused by voices. No! not voices—one voice—that of an old man, evidently talking to himself. This fact I arrived at as soon as I was conscious. He had entered the room whilst I was asleep, and clearly had not observed me, hidden, as my recumbent form was, by the high back of the settle. He was now standing with a lantern close to the bed, his back towards me, chattering away to himself in the most voluble fashion. A tallish, grey-haired man, with round, stooping shoulders, and thin, gaugered legs.

"Mike! Mike, old man, you're late to-night, you're late. Terrible dark till the moon rose; couldn't get on, couldn't get on," were the first words distinctly audible, and, of course, then was the time that I ought to have disclosed myself, but I was in a lazy, drowsy state, disinclined to move, and somehow I hesitated until it seemed too late, for the next minute, having stood the lantern on a shelf, he had taken a small bag from the pocket of his rough smock, and was emptying out of it a little stream of sovereigns on to the counterpane of his bed.

"There's a fine sight! There's a fine lot!" he went on, in croaking, spluttering tones. "Oh! my golden boys! Ha, ha! you'll swell the store. You'll pile it up, won't ye? Ho, ho! my precious pippins; you're the chaps for me! How I love ye, how I love ye, don't I? There, you're all safe now. Nothing like being open and above board; nothing so safe as things that are never locked up. If I was to put ye under lock and key, somebody 'ud be sure to find ye out, and get at ye; if I was to bar and bolt this broken-down old shop, and make a show of securing myself from being robbed, people 'ud think I had got something to rob! They'd say, 'Old Mike's a miser; he's got a rare lot o' money, you may depend.' That fool Jack Turrell, my nephew, and his slut of a wife and all their brats, 'ud be swarming round me like flies on honey, if they didn't think I was as poor as Job! But who 'ud ever think that a man with all the swag I've got in the house 'ud leave door and window open and unfastened. He wouldn't be such a born fool, they'd say; no man would! He, he, he! Ha, ha, ha!" and the old fellow chuckled, and rubbed his hands exultingly in the intervals when he was not dabbling them in the heap of gold, or counting and piling up the sovereigns in little pillars. "Why, I should be robbed and murdered within a week if I wasn't to keep open house and show everybody that there was nothing to steal. Ho, ho! it's rarely

cunning of me, that it is! Folks thinks now what little money I have is all in the bank, and don't suppose I have a penny of it here; but where 'ud be the use, the use of the money in the bank to me? I can't see it, and kiss it, and love it, there! No, no, my precious boys, I'm too fond of ye for that! Now, let's have up all your brothers and sisters, and put ye all together, ye'll make a rare sight by this time! A rare fine family party!"

With this the old fellow lifted the foot of the bedstead away from the wall, and with his foot kicked aside a battered old hat-box standing under the bed. Then, stooping, he raised the plank in the floor, which had thus been discovered, and diving his hands into the aperture, began to pull out some dozen or more strong canvas bags, each evidently filled with his precious golden stores. Then, one by one, he emptied their contents on to the first pile of sovereigns until really an enormous heap of gold lay upon the bed. Then the wretched old man literally shrieked and gasped with excitement and exultation at the sight, and, dropping on his knees, half buried his face and head in the coin, whilst his bony old hands nervously clutched at it or drove themselves greedily down into its depths.

I was spell-bound by the strange and horrid spectacle which had thus, as it seemed, suddenly burst in upon my sleep, like a dreadful nightmare. Had prudence not warned me to remain motionless I doubt if I could, for the time being, have moved or spoken, so strange an effect had this exhibition of the frantic delirious stage of the passion of avarice on my nerves. I take it, it is given but to few to witness it, and certainly I shall never forget it. For fully half an hour did the wretched man revel in, and prolong, his horrid orgy, I can call it nothing else, sheer exhaustion alone appearing to bring it to an end. Panting and foaming at the mouth, he at last stretched himself upon the bed, his head still pillowed on the gold, and for a time lay quite quiet, save for the tremulous twitching of the fingers as they continued dabbling amongst the coin. By degrees he sat upright, and then, counting his hoard methodically, still giving vent at intervals to explosive mutterings of exultation and of his frenzied and loathly lust for gold, gradually replaced it in the bags, never even for a moment casting a glance into the dark obscurity of that end of the room where I lay, the involuntary witness of this strange scene; no, nor ever taking his eyes off the money, but looking as if he would have devoured it with them if he could, until the last sovereign had disappeared, and the precious, useless dross put back in its hiding-place. Then in two minutes he had undressed, blown out his lantern, and, I suppose, tumbled into bed, for within a quarter of an hour he was snoring loudly.

When well assured that he could not be easily awakened, I for the first time sat up to wait for the tardy daylight. I could not move until it appeared, for I dared not risk letting the old man know of my presence after what I had seen. Setting aside the possibility of an accusation of being found on the premises with a felonious intent, I had no taste for coming in contact with the detestable old brute. So, patiently, I waited and waited, till a faint and sickly streak of light from a waning moon was increased sufficiently by the coming dawn to show me the dingy window-blind, and enable me, noiselessly and on tiptoe, to find the door, and slip out into the fresh morning air.

Very soon the cloudless sky was bright enough for me to steer clear of the bog, and within another hour or so I had left far behind me "The Old Mill on the Marsh."

* * * * *

Jack Turrell! Jack Turrell his nephew! This name which the miser had uttered was familiar to me. I had known a youngster at Cambridge so called—a hard-working, capital fellow, but very poor, and who had come to terrible grief. After taking orders, he married some extravagant woman—a widow, with a lot of children—who had let him in, as I had heard, for no end of debt; that he had separated from her; and that it was with the greatest difficulty he could keep body and soul together.

Could this Jack Turrell, by any chance, be the nephew? I determined to find out; for, if he were, it might be just as well that he should know of the resources possessed by his aged and respectable relative at the mill. The inquiries I set on foot led to the discovery that the Turrell in question was none other than my old college friend. He had always been very close concerning his family and connections, so that the kinship did not surprise me. But where was he to be heard of? He was keeping out of the way; however, in the course of a few weeks, I came upon him and found him in a most terrible plight.

In a miserable lodging, in the back slums of Kentish Town, he lay all but at death's door—the scholar, high-minded, generous-hearted fellow, as I knew him to be, who had entirely by his own hard work and unaided efforts taken first-class University honours, and then, by one fatal mistake, had wrecked his life. I sought the parish doctor who was attending him.

"Is there no chance, no hope for him?" I asked.

"None, unless he could afford to go abroad. Two or three years' residence in a southern climate might restore him. Short of that, his days are numbered."

I took a resolution; I went off to the Eastern Counties, and for the second time found my way to "the Old Mill on the Marsh."

History repeats itself—it was, indeed, doing so now. Little could I have calculated on ever crossing that threshold again. Yet, there I was! loudly knocking at the door and shouting at the top of my voice, exactly as I had done three months before; and, as before, getting no answer. Again I am entering the sordid, miserable hovel: once more it seems to be untenanted. But a second glance discovers the old man stretched upon his wretched pallet, much as I must have left him on that eventful morning.

Is he asleep? I walk up to the bed, and the first look tells me that he is. But he will never awake! He will never again add another penny to his hoard! He must have been dead some hours, for he is stiff and cold.

I see that all legal steps are properly taken, and a seal put upon the premises; but I keep my secret for the present. Then I hasten away to the bedside of my friend.

So worn did he look that I trembled as I asked him, "Hadr't you an uncle a miller? I heard of him accidentally, and also that he has just died; have you no claim on his estate?"

"Estate! my dear fellow! he was as poor as Job, and could barely make a living for himself, out of his business."

"But what relatives had he? any besides yourself?"

"No, none; if he had anything to be heir to I should be his heir, but he had nothing."

"Can you bear a great surprise, old friend, news of something that will show you the way to hope, health, and prosperity?"

He smiled wearily, and said no such luck was in store for him, but if it were he thought he could bear it well!

Then I told him my story, and, to make an end of it here, I need only add that John Turrell proved his claim on the miser's hoard, which, but for my timely discovery of it, might have lain *perdu* for years beneath the rotten old flooring of the mill cottage, and until it would have been too late to save a dear and valuable life.

HOW JOHN MORGAN WON HIS WIFE.

BY MRS. EILOART.

The great man of Branscombe Hollow was Sir George Hauteville. He or his forefathers had come over with the Conqueror. He considered himself second to no man in the country. He had the oldest house, the finest trees, the bluest blood, the longest pedigree of any man in that part of the world. Mushroom gentry or millionaire merchants, he despised them all alike; there were plenty in the neighbourhood, as it was but twenty miles from London. He was thoroughly satisfied with himself and his belongings. The prettiest girl in the kingdom called him uncle, and the only fault she had in his eyes was one that, in the case of a pretty girl, as she was, was sure to be cured some day or other, and that was that she wore the name of Brown.

Years ago he had cast off her mother because she chose to marry an Ensign in a marching regiment, who bore that name. The Ensign became a Lieutenant, and then died, leaving Mrs. Brown, with one daughter, not at all well provided for. Then it was that I first knew them. They lived next door to my mother, who, like Mrs. Brown, was a widow, and, like her, had a small income and one child—myself. It was a little country town where we lived, and our street was the genteel, and poorest, and dullest in the place. Nelly Brown and I knew each other from the time we were children; I can't remember the time that we didn't know each other. Our mothers had trouble enough to keep up appearances and give us each a decent education; but these troubles did not affect our happiness, and, when Nelly was sixteen and I barely twenty, we were solemnly engaged to each other.

That was on my first return from walking the hospitals in London. I was to be a medical man, as my father had been before me. My mother had set her heart on that—how she managed to make me one was one of those miracles that mothers only know how to accomplish. But a doctor in good time I became, and went home to announce the fact that I had passed my examination with honours, and to meet with the severest disappointment that had yet befallen me.

Nelly's mother was dead. That in itself was a great blow to me. She was the kindest friend, and truest lady I had ever known; but that was not all. Nelly's uncle, who had ignored her existence and that of her mother during the lifetime of the latter, had made his appearance at Waring as soon as he heard of his sister's death, followed at her funeral, and taken Nelly away with him to his place at Branscombe.

Nelly had left a little letter for me with my mother, in which she said she was "still the same as ever," and how many times I read that letter I decline to say. But still Nelly was, to all practical purposes, out of my world altogether. If not exactly her uncle's heiress—the estate was entailed in the male line, which was represented by a distant cousin—still, as the acknowledged niece of Sir George Hauteville, living under his roof, mixing in society to which no mere professional man could aspire, she would be as much out of my reach as would be any one of the Royal Princesses.

That was the way my mother argued—sorrowfully enough, for she was very fond of Nelly; but her arguments failed to convince me. If Nelly herself was still the same as ever, nothing should part us, and I would yet win her for my wife.

Of course, I wrote in answer to the letter, and Nelly wrote back, lovingly and tenderly as ever. This went on for a little while; then came a break in our correspondence. She had thought it due to her uncle to acquaint him with our engagement; in fact, circumstances—which circumstances I construed to mean another and unwelcome suitor—made it necessary that she should do so. Then Sir George forbade the correspondence, and desired that the engagement should be given up. Nelly did not enter into particulars; but I fancy he had been rather peremptory. However, my dear girl kept her faith, though she said that, while under Sir George's roof, she could not disobey him by writing to or receiving letters from me; and so we must wait in silence till better times, which I interpreted till I could make a home for her.

That very day I saw an advertisement in the *Times* for a medical assistant in Lorton, which, as I knew very well, was the nearest town to Branscombe Hollow. That advertisement I answered; that situation I obtained; and judge of my delight when I found that my employer was the medical attendant of the whole establishment at Branscombe Hall, including Sir George himself.

It was a capital berth, independently of the especial reasons which made it so delightful to me. There was plenty of practice, a good salary; my employer was a gentleman, and treated me like one; and if, now and then, he took things rather easily, and liked a run up to town in the opera season, or to follow the hounds when hunting came round, why that only gave me yet more opportunities of improving in a profession to which, for Nelly's sake as well as its own, I had devoted myself heart and soul. But Dr. Gordon had no wish to overwork me; I might have had more leisure on weekdays than I chose to take; but, to his surprise, all I asked for was ample time on Sunday mornings to attend church, intimating at the same time that there was no church in Lorton I cared to go to. He had no objection to this; nay, he was such a good-natured old bachelor that perhaps he guessed my motives, for he told me, with a laugh, that I might worship where and whom I pleased.

So every Sunday morning Dr. Gordon went to the parish church at Lorton, at the risk of being interrupted in his devotions; and I took a two-mile walk to the old church at Branscombe Hollow, where, in its pew of state, surrounded by his lowlier neighbours, Sir George set a good example to those beneath him by the loudness with which he uttered the responses and the profound attention he gave to the sermon. He never saw me; but somebody else did. The very first Sunday Nelly espied me, though I was half hidden behind a pillar, and blushed and brightened with the loveliest, deepest crimson. She passed me when she went out. I touched her dress; I caught one kind glance; and I went home the happiest, most hopeful fellow under the sun. This lasted for a year. One whole twelvemonth, let the weather be what it might—hail, rain, snow or wind—I went my two-mile walk, and was rewarded with the sight of Nelly, but never interchanged a word with or received a line from her.

Then I got tired of waiting so quietly, and I wrote to Nelly asking her if I might not now appeal to Sir George to let us at least correspond. I had for answer that I might try, but that the trial would be useless. And so it proved. I wrote to Sir George, stating that I was making way in my profession; that I hoped, before many years were past, to be able to provide a home for a wife; that I had no wish for any dowry with her; and that, as Nelly's engagement with me had been sanctioned by her late mother, I could not consider myself unduly presumptuous in asking him, as Nelly's guardian, to sanction it likewise.

Sir George did not keep me waiting for an answer, and the answer was a plain one. He professed himself to be astounded at my audacity; at the same time he was good enough to say that a doctor might be a gentleman, and that if I had made such a footing in my profession as Fergusson or Gull, and others of a similar standing had done, he might have taken

my proposal into consideration; but, for a mere country apothecary—a stripling with his way to make, and nothing to show that he was ever likely to make such way—to aspire to the hand of Sir George Hauteville's niece, was an unequalled piece of presumption.

I folded up that letter, and I said to myself, "I'll not only aspire to Sir George's niece, but I'll win her." Then I went about my day's duties, took my round of patients, and came home—it was Saturday night—happy in the thought that tomorrow I should at least rejoice in the sight of my Nelly.

She looked very unhappy when I did see her. Her eyes were red, and her face was pale. I heard afterwards that Sir George had insisted that she should think no more of me; that he had spoken of my presumption in the severest terms, and had done his best to make her promise to break off with me entirely. I went home very unhappy, blaming my unlucky stars that I could not at once offer Nelly a home, and wondering what would be the smallest pittance on which we could keep house together. To think of her being under that old martinet's authority! He would break her heart! He would crush her spirit! I was full of a thousand apprehensions for her; and the one look she had given me on leaving the church, which seemed so full of suffering patience, haunted me all the night through.

In the morning, when I went down, I found Dr. Gordon in scarlet, and as full of spirits as he generally was when a day's hunting was before him. "I must leave all to you to-day," he said. "Luckily, there is not much in hand. We are to meet at Sir George's; and, if the fox only does his duty, I don't know at what time you will see me back to-night. I dare say I shall dine at the Hall. Sir George generally takes a few of us home after a day's sport; and I know I can leave everything to you."

He made his breakfast as calmly as if he were not going into Nelly's presence; as if to be at the Hall, to see her, to sit by her side, was the most everyday event that could befall him. I don't know which was the predominant feeling in my mind, envy of his good fortune, or indignation at the indifference with which he regarded it. Poor fellow! he rode away cheerily enough, little thinking of the price he was to pay for that day's sport.

When I came home at six, expecting my dinner, to which I was prepared to do ample justice, Mrs. Simpson, Dr. Gordon's housekeeper, met me in the hall with a troubled face. Would I go up stairs and see her master? He had had a bad accident in the hunting-field, and they had brought him home an hour ago. He was quite sensible, and had been asking repeatedly for me. I went up to him at once.

"Another patient, Morgan," he said, with a laugh. He was evidently in great pain, but perfectly cheerful. "You'll have double work on your hands a little longer than we either of us bargained for. I've damaged my leg a good deal. You'll be able to do all that's wanted for me; and in a few weeks I shall be about again. But Sir George is in a worse fix than I am. Our two horses took the same hedge almost at the same moment, and rolled over each other. The poor animals are done for, and it's a miracle Sir George and I have not shared their fate."

I saw to his hurt, which was not alarming; and then he spoke again of Sir George. "He fell on his face and bruised it awfully. I saw it when they raised him; and I fancied, by what I heard, he had some internal injury. His horse rolled on him. My poor Dick simply threw me. We were both of us perfectly sensible when we had had a little brandy, and I asked if he would have you to attend him? He answered that he didn't want boys, and told those about him to send his groom off to town for Sir W. H—" (at that time there was no telegraph office within a dozen miles). "Curious chance, wasn't it, for a man's doctor to be disabled by the same accident that laid himself up? There, now go and get your dinner; and tell Mrs. Simpson to make me some toast-and-water and keep the house quiet. I should like to sleep, if I can."

I ate my solitary dinner, then crept softly up to the door of the Doctor's room, and was glad to find him in a sound sleep. Then I had to go out again, to a couple of rather serious cases in the town; and, having duly attended to them, I thought I would go to the station and see if the great medico from London had come. I found Sir George's carriage waiting there; and the station-master told me the train by which Sir William H— was expected would be shortly in. I thought I should like to have a good look at him again, and see how time was dealing with him. So I went on the platform; but, as far as seeing Sir William was concerned, with no result. Half a dozen passengers stepped out when the train came in, but not one of them was the great doctor. "It's a bad look out for Sir George," said the station-master; and, unless they put on a special for him, there won't be another down train for five hours."

Five hours! A badly-bruised face, eyesight injured, perhaps gone; serious internal hurts, and a heavy elderly man. I cast up the little sum, and the total was very unfavourable to the master of Branscombe Hall. Why couldn't he have let me attend him; or, at any rate, do what I could till the great gun came down from London. For the last six months I had had more than half Dr. Gordon's patients on my hands, with results that had been very satisfactory both to themselves and to him; and I really did not see why I could not attend to Sir George's hurts as well as to those of the carter over whose legs his waggon-wheels had gone, or the ploughman on whose body his own horses had trodden. I resolved to go to the house and offer my services, till Sir William came. They could but be rejected; and, at any rate, I should have done my duty. I went up to the coachman, as he sat in state on his box. He had evidently been consoling himself for his master's injuries with an extra glass. "Wait here for five minutes," I said, "till I get one or two things I want, and then you can take me up to Sir George."

"You be the doctor, I suppose, Sir?" he said, and touched his hat with a shaky forefinger.

"I am a doctor," I answered, which I thought was information enough for him; "but I can't work without my tools, and I haven't got them all with me."

I hurried home, put up instruments, bandages, and other still appliances, gave a hasty look at Dr. Gordon, who was sleeping soundly, told Mrs. Simpson I might be out all night as I had a very bad case in hand, and gave her ample directions as to the proper attendance on her master, and then went off in state to the Hall, the coachman who drove me firmly believing that he had the honour of driving Sir William H—. We met with no accident on the road, which was almost more than I had expected, considering the state of my chariot; and when we arrived at the house found the upper servants anxiously expecting us. I did not think it necessary to give either butler or housekeeper any explanations, but asked to be shown to Sir George's room at once. Nelly was there, sitting by his side. She gave a little start when she saw me, but I held up my finger to enjoin silence, and turned at once to my patient. His face was fearfully bruised and swollen, and his eyes were closed—it would be days, I expected, before he would be able to open them. He was perfectly conscious, however, and informed me, in answer to the first question I put, that I had been "a devil of a time coming."

"If you will allow me to explain, Sir George," I said.

"I do not want any explanations. Now you have come, do what you can for me, or I shall be dead before the morning," he said, testily.

He was evidently in great pain, possibly in danger, I could do what I could for him pending H—'s arrival, and make my explanations when he was able to hear them. I asked Nelly to leave the room—if I had been H— himself I couldn't have done it in a more professional manner—and then, with the help of the valet and butler, I set to work.

Sir George was severely injured, that was certain. I didn't feel at all sure that, if H— came, he would be able to pull him through. I made up my mind to remain for the night, and got a little rest, at intervals, on a couch in the room. In the morning my patient, who had had a little sleep, was rather easier, and H— had not, as I had been expecting, made his appearance. I gave Sir George a little nourishment, myself. It required a more skilful hand than that of a servant to administer it; and, blind as he was, he evidently knew me from them, taking me, however, for Sir William.

"Must you go back to town to-day, doctor?" he said. "If any arrangements could be made for you to see me through this I should be glad. My own medical man is laid up, and the only other in the place is a boy fresh from the hospitals—and a d—d impertinent puppy into the bargain, he added, in a lower tone.

"I think I can stay for a day or two," I said, with all due professional gravity, "and then we will see how things go;" but you must allow me to leave you for a few hours, Sir George, and to send up to London for a nurse."

I saw Nelly before I went. I thought I had a right to that indulgence after my exertions in her uncle's behalf. I explained the whole state of the case to her, and advised her not to let her uncle know, when Sir William did make his appearance, that the "boy from the hospitals" had added to his impertinence by taking care of him during the night. Then I sent up to London for a suitable nurse. That messenger went and came, having duly executed his errand; but of the groom who had been dispatched for the great doctor we still saw and heard nothing. Then I went to see Dr. Morgan, who was going on very well, and whom I did not think it necessary to trouble with an account of my proceedings during the night, and, after going my rounds, went again to the Hall, where I found the nurse had arrived, but not Sir William.

Sir George was a little better, and very glad to have me back. I began to feel more hopeful, but still quite aware that Death would not give him up too easily. Then, as I looked on him, I decided on my course. I would try and save him. The case was bad, but it was a straightforward one enough, and, I honestly believed, was one that any fairly competent medical man, who could give the due care and attention, might deal with as readily as Sir William H— himself. I liked difficult cases. I liked the hand-to-hand fight with Death, the forcing him to give up his grasp of his expected victim. Such a contest roused a feeling of pugnacity in me, a determination not to be baffled and conquered if skill or patience could prevent it, and I only hoped now that Sir William would not make his appearance, so that I, puppy and boy as I was, might bring back to life and health the man who had so called me.

Well, as I said, the great doctor from London never came, and I went on doing his work for him. If any of the servants recognised me, which I dare say some of them did, it was no business of theirs to interfere, as their master's niece evidently regarded me as his medical attendant. Sir George was too ill at first, besides being too much impressed with a sense of his own importance, to think it very wonderful that one of the first medical men in London should find it worth his while to neglect all his London patients for the sake of a single country gentleman. When he became a little better, he would have monopolised my time completely if I would have allowed him. He had certainly taken a fancy to me, and was very pleased when I rendered him any little services which, perhaps, were more a nurse's work than a doctor's. He liked to keep me in talk, or, rather, for me to hear him talk, and had a number of strange theories in medicine and surgery which he was glad to propound to one who he imagined must be so good a judge of their feasibility. We had many a long discussion in his sick room, and I found that, when I was not there, he was never weary of uttering my praises to Nelly. I got to like him, myself, much better than at one time I could have thought possible. He was eccentric, and fearfully proud, but good and sound at heart, I was convinced. Then, too, he was very kind to Nelly, and Nelly had grown very fond of him. Altogether, I felt ready, if Sir George would only allow me to call him uncle, to make one of the best of nephews. Nelly herself was very anxious that he should know to whom he was indebted for his recovery, and one day informed me that she could not much longer keep him in ignorance of the true state of the case. He had been praising me more warmly than ever. I was not only a doctor, but a thorough good fellow, well informed, well educated, and able to hold my own anywhere. There was not a lady in the kingdom whom a man like that might not aspire to. If she, Nelly, had fallen in love with such a one he might have said something to it. Nay, he would have said something to the tune of five thousand pounds and his blessing; but to want to throw herself away on a country doctor's assistant, a fellow who would most likely be a mere apothecary all his life, was a piece of absurdity he hoped that by this time she was ashamed of.

"He must know the truth," said Nelly, "if you think he is able to bear it, John."

"If his eyes are able to bear the light he shall know everything the next time I come," I said.

All this time Sir George had had the upper part of his face so covered with bandages that he was virtually blind. Indeed, at one time, I had been afraid that he might become really so. But he was now much better, and I made up my mind, the next time I came, to remove the bandages, and let him look on the face of his doctor. He was delighted enough when I told him I thought he could bear daylight now; and looked eagerly and tenderly enough towards Nelly as soon as his eyes were free.

"We shan't fall out, my dear, even if I am not quite so handsome a fellow as I was," he said, holding out his hand to her, though I don't know that we Hautevilles—ladies, of course, excepted—were ever remarkable for good looks. Am I very much scared, doctor," he added, turning to me. He looked at me a little curiously, then said, "Upon my word, Sir William, to have made the name you have made you're the youngest-looking fellow I ever saw in my life; and—and, you'll excuse me, but there's something about your face that's rather familiar to me. I certainly have seen some one very like you in our own neighbourhood."

"That's very possible, Sir George," I said, "for I'm not half such an important personage as Sir William H—. I am a sadly insignificant person altogether; still, I can lay claim to the honour and pleasure of having attended you with very fair success since that unfortunate accident of yours."

"And where the deuce is Sir William, Sir, and, above all, who are you?"

Sir William H— is, I believe, in London at the present

time. Nothing has been heard of the man who was dispatched for him on one of your best horses, and I am John Morgan, at your service, Sir George."

My patient lost his temper so completely that I was afraid he would throw himself back and undo all my labour for the last six weeks. He would hear of no explanation, either from Nelly or me, and at last I thought it best to take my leave, and go at once to Dr. Gordon and put my case and my patient's both in his hands.

He was astonished at my audacity in conducting a case which, from what I told him, was one that would have tried the skill even of the great man whose substitute I had been. He was equally astonished at my audacity in aspiring to the hand of my patient's niece. But he was getting about now, and able to go to the Hall himself. He found Sir George in a fair way of recovery, but furious at the deception which he considered had been practised upon him. To have heard him, one would have thought I had shot the horse and murdered the groom for my own ends. But he was ready to acknowledge that I had done as much for him as Sir William himself could have done, and that I might in time be something better than a mere apothecary. Nelly reminded him of the manner in which he had expressed himself concerning me, and he was too proud a man to go back from his word. He said that, in right of my skill and talents, I was good enough for his niece, and abided, in a grim fashion of his own, by what he had said.

He gave Nelly to me, and he gave me five thousand pounds with her; and we took a house in a good part of London, and I have made way even beyond my own expectations, which were always sanguine enough.

Some months after my marriage I came across the missing groom in one of the London hospitals; and then I learned how it was I had been enabled to take Sir William H—'s place. The man had duly reached the great surgeon's house, and learned that he was at the other end of the kingdom occupied on a critical case, which it was impossible to leave for a day or two. John thought both he and his horse would be the better for rest and refreshment, and sought both at an inn he knew just out of London. There he took somewhat more than was good for him, and soon, after he had remounted his horse, used the spur so freely that the animal, who had certainly a right to think himself entitled to return home at a slower pace than that at which he had left it, threw his rider and started off without him. John was disabled for a week. His horse, no doubt, soon found another master, but John, ashamed to return and own his misadventure, did not find it so easy to do so. He got what jobs he could in London, lived from hand to mouth, fell ill; and so I found him.

Well, of course Sir George was the loser by John's want of sobriety; but then I was very much the gainer. If he had come back straight to the Hall another great doctor would have been sent for at once, I should never have had the honour of curing Sir George, and never have had the best of wives for a fee. I forgave John, like a Christian; and he drives my carriage and pair now, and looks—and I believe his looks do not belie him—as if he never tasted anything stronger than water.

A FAMILY RELIC.

"Here is the Sword!—Now for the tale—you know You promised us so very long ago." Thus pleaded Nellie; while her sister Prue Added a sweet petitionary "Do!" Tell us the story of these rusty stains, And you shall have a sweet song for your pains."

Thus urged, their uncle took the ancestral brand, Wellnigh too weighty for his single hand, And thus began—"I shall not take you back Through this sword's lengthy genealogic track; Lest it should be like that Welsh pedigree (As in veracious Miller you may see) That notes—'About this time was Adam living,' And then goes on remoter links still giving. I'll not detail all that our archives say Of its performance in the killing way, Far back in mystifying history's youth, But give one incident that's known for truth.

Sir Hugh—whose 'scutcheon in yon window glows, Through which the light this Christmas morning flows, And paints your heads, fair nieces, with its gold And green and azure—in the days of old To this, our ancient house, brought great renown, Which others have unsullied handed down. That was a time of lawless riot, when The right was laughed to scorn by lawless men; And he, a veritable Arthur in his time, Went righting wrong and extirpating crime. One day, o'erpowered by numbers, he was cast Into a loathsome dungeon, bound full fast; Where as he lay a spirit came one night— Or such she seemed, so spiritually bright— Drew back the bolts, loosed chains, and set him free; Whispering, "Your sword is 'neath an apple-tree, Close hid, the third beyond the orchard gate; And near some faithful followers you await. Adieu, Sir Knight!" And the fair maiden fled Before a word of grateful thanks was said. Sir Hugh soon found, as told, his trusty brand— This self-same sword—and, with his little band, Upon the troop of base marauders flew, And wrought dire vengeance on the fiendish crew. Misrule and violence from the country passed, And this good sword was sheathed in peace at last. What of that lady fair? you ask. That dame, Or damsel, your great-grandmama became.—ANON.

My whole in London city plain appears, By day and night, through all the long-drawn years. Bisect it, and my first will scatheless stand, Most self-important being in the land; My second plays chief part amid the hum And clatter of a modish kettledrum.—L.

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 lessons:—

PUDDINGS.
LESSON No. 13.—CORN FLOUR PUDDING.
 Average cost of a "Corn Flour Pudding" (in a cup).

INGREDIENTS.

2 dessert spoonsful of corn flour	d.
3 pint of milk	1
6 lumps of sugar	04
1 egg	1
		3d

Time required, about an hour.

Now we will show you how to make a Corn Flour Pudding (in
 a cup for infants or invalids).

1. We put a saucepan half full of warm water on the fire to
 boil.
2. We put two dessert spoonsful of corn flour into a saucepan.
3. We pour in by degrees half a pint of milk, mixing it very
 smoothly. N.B.—We take care that it does not get lumpy.
4. We now add to it six lumps of sugar, put the saucepan on
 the fire, and stir smoothly until it boils; it will take about ten
 minutes.
5. We then move the saucepan to the side of the fire.
6. We break one egg into the saucepan, and beat it up until it
 is all well mixed.
7. We take a cup (just large enough to hold the pudding), and
 grease it inside with a piece of butter.
8. We pour the mixture out of the saucepan into the cup.
9. We take a small cloth, wring it out in boiling water, and
 we lay it tie it over the top of the cup with a piece of string.
10. We should tie the four corners of the cloth over the
 top of the cup.
11. When the water in the saucepan is quite boiling, we put it
 in the cup and let it boil for twenty-five minutes.
12. For serving, we take the cloth off the cup, and the pudding
 may be turned out or not, according to taste.

Now it is finished.

CAKES.
LESSON No. 6.—CORN 1 LOUR CAKE.
 Average cost of a "Corn Flour Cake" (about three quarters
 of a pound).

INGREDIENTS.

1 lb. of corn flour	d.
1 lb. of loaf sugar	2
2 oz. of butter	2
1 teaspoonful of baking powder	04
2 eggs	2
		7d

Time required, about one hour.

Now we will show you how to make a Corn Flour Cake.

1. We put two ounces of butter into a basin, and beat it to a
 cream.
2. We add to the butter a quarter of a pound of pounded loaf
 sugar, and mix it well.
3. We break in two eggs and beat all well together.
4. We now stir lightly into the mixture a quarter of a pound
 of corn flour and a teaspoonful of baking powder, and beat it well
 together for five minutes.
5. We grease a cake-tin inside with butter or dripping.
6. We pour the mixture into the tin and put it immediately
 into the oven (the heat should rise to 240 deg.) to bake for half
 an hour.
7. After that time we turn the cake out of the tin and slant it
 against a plate until it is cold. (This will prevent its getting
 heavy).
8. If preferred, the mixture could be baked in small tins
 instead of the large one, in which case it would only take fifteen
 minutes to bake.

Now it is finished.

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A SCIENTIFIC CHRISTMAS.

Philosophy in sport, or rather science in fun, may be carried beyond a joke. That clever and eccentric old gentleman, Sir Liberty Hall, Bart., whose favourite pursuit was experimental physics, used his superior knowledge to invent strange mystifications for his Christmas guests. Having diligently attended the lectures and actual demonstrations upon the subject at the Royal Institution, he ordered a great deal of costly and complex apparatus to be sent down to St. Oswald's Abbey. There, in the stately Elizabethan mansion reared by his ancestors upon the site of the ancient monastic foundation, surrounded by a noble deer-park and woods abundantly stocked with pheasants he never cared to shoot, this enthusiastic amateur sat among Leyden jars, galvanic batteries, and a variety of electrical machines. He had got hundreds of miles of copper and iron wire coiled up in his cellars, and he devoted some weeks, aided by the local plumber and glazier and bell-hanger, to an extensive series of incomprehensible arrangements all over the house. In the absence of her Ladyship with her sons and daughters, who remained at Hastings till the third week of December, Sir Liberty was enabled to play the master at home, and to do what he liked with his own, in a style worthy of the name he bore.

A numerous party of staying visitors, including several uncles and aunts and many junior cousins of both sexes, had been invited to the Abbey upon this occasion to enjoy the family hospitalities and festivities during the Christmas week. The lady mistress and the young people returned home just in time to receive their expected company. Domestic preparations of the needful kind had been duly made by the experienced housekeeper and butler, with the services of cook and kitchen-maid, of footman and housemaid, under tolerable discipline. Sir Liberty Hall was supposed, as he had promised his confiding spouse, to be exercising a general superintendence over these proper departments of household stewardship. Whatever he had been about in the time his wife was away, she found nothing amiss or wanting, either in kitchen or parlour, dining-room or drawing-room, up stairs or down stairs, or in all the bed-chambers, which seemed in perfect readiness for the arrival of twenty or thirty friends. We have received the following account of what took place from the late butler, Mr. John Tapper, who has left his situation.

"Now, I really feel for her Ladyship, who is a kindly, honest, good-natured sort of woman, and I am quite ashamed to tell of the tricks that were played upon her invited company, by day and by night, from the 20th to the 27th of December, in that bewitched old Abbey manor house, through the mad freaks of Sir Liberty Hall. It was a scandal to the whole county, and to the respectable order of landlord aristocracy, which ought never again to be repeated, unless we mean to overthrow both Church and State. If we are to follow the example of those French Communists, in preferring a chemist or professor of physics to the Presidency of the New Republic, these doings and goings-on may be all right and fit in times to come. But I only hope those times will not come in my time.

"The first party that drove up to the house door, when the gentlemen got out of the coach and went to pull the bell-handle, to be let in, the electric spirit or devil, or whatever it was, that was put into the brass knob, caught hold of the palm of his hand, and almost wrenched his arm out of his shoulder, making him shriek and howl with pain before it let him go. That was a pretty way of shaking hands with a visitor at one's own door! I do say, that for a clever, learned, book-reading old gentleman, like Sir Liberty Hall, with his scientific philosophy and all that, to do such a thing at a place like St. Oswald's Abbey, is enough to make St. Oswald and all the old Abbots and monks, and all the Knights and Baronets that have lived there since, come up out of their graves to rebuke him. Friar Bacon, they say, was a sort of scientific man, and so was Prince Rupert; but neither Monk nor Cavalier, six hundred or two hundred years ago, ever thought what the nineteenth century would come to.

"Reverence for antiquity is here utterly lost. The awful scene we were compelled to witness in the great hall on Christmas Eve was nothing less than sacrilege. Would you believe it, that he brought out the suits of knightly armour, which his great ancestors wore in the Wars of the Roses or in the Tournaments at King Henry's or King Edward's Court; and he fitted them upon iron frames to stand upright, and put their feet upon roller-skates; and then, with a set of electric wires to their arms and legs, he set these warlike old figures dancing all over the smooth oak floor! That is neither more nor less than what Sir Liberty Hall did with the plate-armour of Sir Geoffrey, Sir Miles, and Sir Ralph, that used to hang on the wall, and to look so grand and noble.

"But I won't deny that there was some harmless fun with his queer tricks and traps and the shocks he gave us at every turn—it was all very shocking—to the gentlefolk as well as the servants, till we were all set laughing together. There was a Mistletoe, of course, or else the Christmas wouldn't have been a proper spree for the young ladies and the young gentlemen, like. Well, but the old gentleman, he was so clever and artful, you know, that he had fixed up a telegraph wire to the Mistletoe Bough. And the wire, it goes along the passage and up the stairs to a sort of clock or indicator dial, where the company was having their supper. And so, when Mr. Jack Springleton, that is my Lady's nephew in Berkshire, who had come for one of the party, kisses his cousin, Miss Emily, what does this telegraph clock do, but strikes a bell, and signals what's going on down there in the Conservatory? And they all jump up from their chairs, my Lady and the Hon. Mrs. Crisp, and Lady Springleton and Miss, and the rest, and run down stairs, to catch my young lady and her young man in their love-making. But, of course, it passed for a joke; only her Ladyship of this house was not very well pleased.

"And at dinner on Christmas Day there was one grand upset, when Thomas was bringing in the second plum-pudding. You see, the old gentleman had been down in the kitchen with Cook, and what he fixed up in that dish I cannot rightly understand, but it was connected with some of his wires and his electric batteries in the study up stairs. All I know is that the pudding flew in pieces like a bomb-shell and scattered about the room. Thomas was frightened nearly into fits, while the company at table were all in fits of laughter.

"Then, on the last night, they kept it up dancing, when the young people had been footing away merrily, till near three o'clock in the morning, there was a regular massacre of them all at once. They'd all joined hands to go round and round, you know, in the way of the dance; and two of the youngsters, at Sir Liberty Hall's bidding, had slyly laid a wire round the circle on the floor. So young Tommy, when he gets the tip, he takes up the handle and just touches it off! My eyes! didn't it make them skip, and the girls to squall, and the boys to laugh and shout, and then to finish with three cheers for Sir Liberty! And there was a vote passed then and there, by the whole company of guests and friends, to alter the name of St. Oswald's Abbey; and henceforth to call both the place and master 'Electricity Hall!'

"This is my account of the matter.

"JOHN TAPPER (Late Butler at the Abbey)."

"MY CHRISTMAS BOX!"

O'er Melton Hall a gathering shadow lay,
Though now had dawned another Christmas Day,
And all had been arranged to welcome it
With festal honours that the day befit;
For that hilarious maiden, Catherine,
Sole daughter of the house, began to pine;
No radiant smiles wreathed now her dimpling face,
No more her laughter echoed through the place;
A numbing languor, creeping by degrees,
All her bright faculties began to seize.

But, see! what miracle on Kate is wrought!
How has the maiden this fine rapture caught?
She who so listlessly one moment stirred
Now skips as airily as any bird.
Waving aloft an open letter, she
Dances with more than her old buoyancy.
Who would have thought the postman's sharp rat-tat
Could such life-giving power possess as that?
One moment at the doorway Katie stands,
With the just-opened letter in her hands;
Her tell-tale eyes most eloquently bright,
Her face now kindled with her soul's delight.
Crying "My Christmas Box!" all in a flutter
She to her mother runs her joy to utter;
And tells her love, or partly tells; the rest
A mother's subtle instinct quickly guessed.
Thus, amid sobs and laughter, ran her tale—
Rose-red her face, that long had been so pale.

"Yes, Archibald is true, as good as gold,
And all his love for me has frankly told;
Why that fine London lady, Amy Smart,
Had never shared an atom of his heart.
It happened thus. He must, his father said,
At once go some far journey in his stead.
Then Archie mentioned of his visits here,
And spoke of me, and how I was most dear;
And that he did not care a pin for life
Unless some day he had me for his wife.
And then—what do you think, Mamma!—outspoke
His father—seriously, and not in joke—
'I see no reason in the world, my man,
Against your having her—that's if you can.
I've met your Kate, and what I heard and saw
Makes me approve the lass as daughter-in-law.'
Now wasn't it kind of him to speak like this?
I'll give him, some day, such a hearty kiss!
And O, Mamma, there's something more to say—
Dear Archie's coming here this very day;
And from his mother brings a note to you,
Who were, she says, in youth her friend most true.
His father said, 'Eat there your Christmas dinner;
And if you can, my boy, go in and win her!'
'Win if he can'—O, dear! it sounds like fun—
I know, I feel, I am already won."
When frankly thus the maid her love confessed
She hid her blushes in her mother's breast.

The Christmas bells glad music pour amain,
But Katie's heart throbs yet a tenderer strain.—J. I.

TIRED OUT.

Tired out! you pet of golden curls;
Dear sweetest rosebud of small girls;
Loved with the tender love that all
Bestow on things so sweet and small.
What has tired out our rosy pet,
This second Christmas she's seen yet?
Ah! well I guess, our best of misses
Is homeward borne, tired out with kisses,
With softest words and fondest sayings,
With merriest laughs and shrillest playings,
With lovings, romplings, and all treats
Of tasting cakes and eating sweets.

Tired out! so seek your downy nest
And warm and rosy, sink to rest,
And all your slumbering visions be
Of things that Elsie's self would see,
Not of our care and toil and strife,
But all that now to you is life.
Ah, would the joy, to your small seeming,
That makes existence in your dreaming,
Might be your lot through all your hours,
And all your way be still through flowers;
So that, tired out, your latest breath
Should give you to blest dreams in death.

W. C. BENNETT.

WELCOME HOME.

The waves have beat, the winds have blown,
This whole night long so wearily;
And I no moment's sleep have known
For thought of him that's at the sea.
I got me up, I oped the door,
I stepped upon the foamy beach,
I shrank to hear the surges roar,
The billows clashing each on each.

No moon was there to light the dark,
The stars seemed few and little worth,
I could not bear the waves to mark
That rushed against the solid earth.
It shook, and I, with terror filled
To know my love so far from land—
Sure never vessel's fragile build
The crash of tumbling seas could stand.

Ah, when he comes, and when my heart
Beats hard against his stormy breast,
I think my very life will part
To know him safe, at home, at rest!
What words shall tell him all my love,
That wayward fancies sometimes hide?
How speak my joy all joys above
To have my husband at my side?

Oh not a word, and not the speech
Of hands that wild and helpless move,
Will bear the tidings that shall reach
His inmost heart, of my dear love.
But something crying from my face,
An eager silence, grave and glad,
Shall light the rough and gloomy place
With Welcome to my fisher-lad!

EDWARD ROSE.

AFTER CHURCH—THE COMPLIMENTS
OF THE SEASON.

Queen Caroline bonnets in fashion again, eh? Ah! thereby hangs a tale of Christmas in the merry days of George the Fourth—which Mr. Fred. Barnard has adorned with accustomed character and humour, but to which the moral has yet to be supplied.

What! A pretty face looks well under any bonnet! I am with you there entirely. You never peep—well, "hardly ever" peep, you rogues—beneath the wide brim to gladden your hearts with a momentary glimpse of beauty. I did the same with equal rarity in my salad days, lads.

One face there is that Mr. Barnard's picture brings to my memory with a vividness which you will understand presently. I am carried by it close upon sixty years back to dear old Brighton. In those days we kept up Christmas in the good old style. Those were not skeleton Christmases, but flesh and blood Christmases. Ay, and there was some heart in the particular Christmas I have in my mind, boys.

It was Christmas Eve in Brighton; and the yule log on jovial Aylmer's hearth burnt all the more brightly in our imaginations from the wintry whiteness of the streets without; and the clusters of tall wax candles against the walls made the holly-berries seem redder than ever I remember them since. Aylmer was one of those jolly hosts with port-wine visages, twinkling eyes, and muscatel lips, who make you feel at home at once. Mrs. Aylmer was as rosy and comely a matron as you could meet in England. As for Grandame Aylmer, with her nut-brown wig, Ribstone-apple cheeks, and benevolent smile, she was one of those rare old ladies who preserve the freshness of youth undimmed to the last—the delight alike of the young and the middle-aged. Ruth Aylmer was indescribable. You have beauties portrayed nowadays in every shop window. Take the best features of each, and unite them in fancy in one being, and then you could not realise the dainty loveliness of Ruth. In a word, Ruth was incomparable. I idolised her; dreamt of her blue eyes, arch smile, and winsome ways by night; but, with that diffidence which always appears to increase with the intensity of a passion in the modest (ahem!), when brought face to face with Ruth, I was generally dumb. Of this complaint I was destined to be cured ere that Christmas Eve was over. Dancing was the general amusement. But I found it very difficult, indeed, to gain Ruth for a partner by reason of the pertinacious court paid her by an elegant dandy, who had crept into high favour at the Pavilion, for no earthly reason that I could learn except the nice conduct of his clouded cane, the elegant manner in which he took snuff, and the finished cut of his clothes. How Mr. Aylmer could have tolerated such an affected beau in his house I couldn't imagine. Yet there he was, carrying all before him—dancing dance after dance with Ruth, whose gaiety made me quite jealous of the fantastic fop—and I fancied Beau Barber was, in short, winning all the honours till, happening to stand up with pretty Mrs. Lockyer in a quadrille, I heard that very sensible lady drop a few criticisms that restored my confidence.

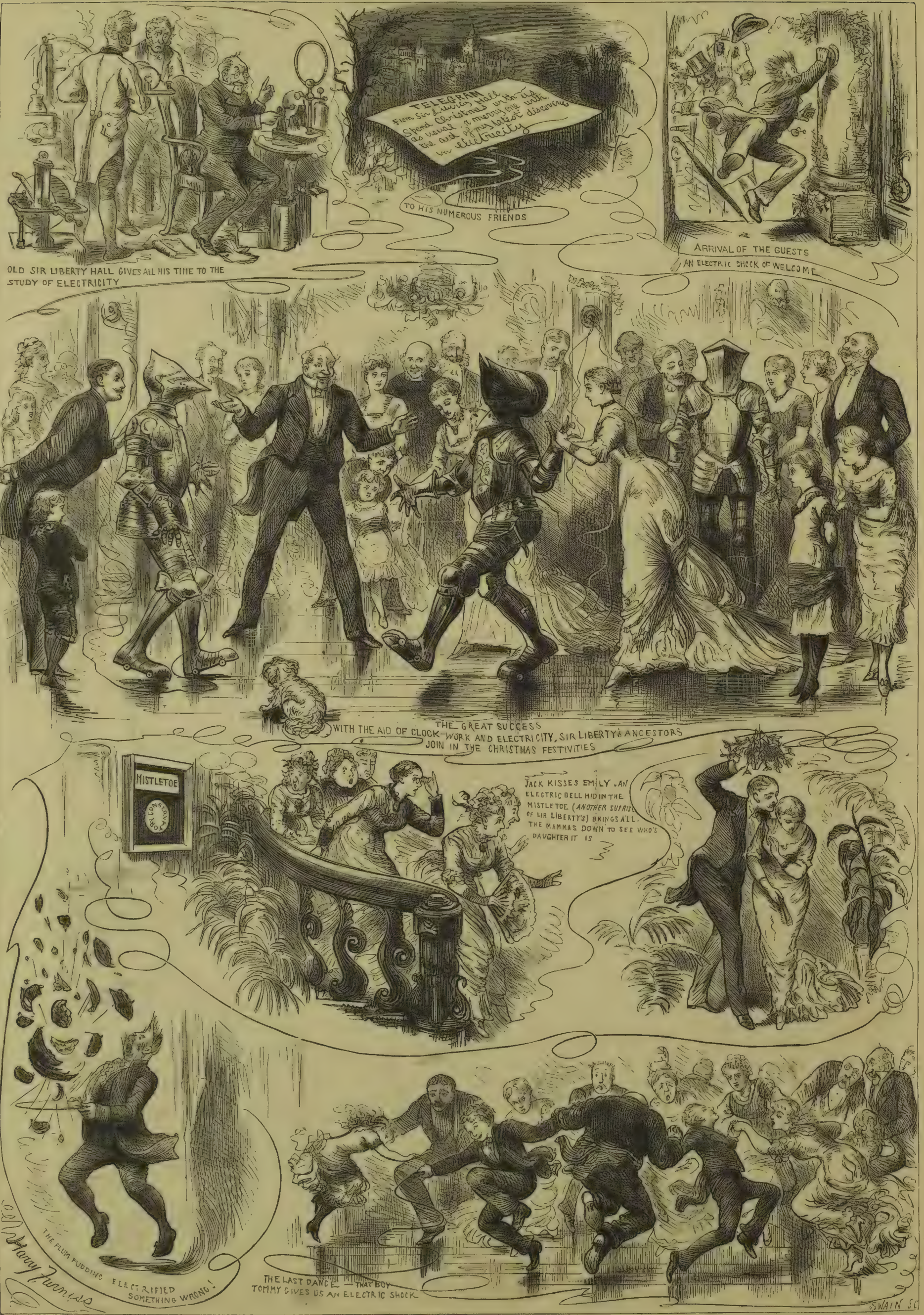
"A good dancer!" Mrs. Lockyer said, answering a leading question of mine with an arch smile at his elaborate posings and minute pirouettes before Ruth. "Yes; he's a good dancing master. But I fancy Ruth would prefer a man for partner!" The simple remark quite gave me the courage of my affections. It was near midnight, and the musicians were tuning up for the last dance. I was fortunate enough to win Ruth's hand for the Sir Roger de Coverley; and, emboldened as I felt, her pretty little hand and inviting waist were pressed, no doubt, with a lover's vigour. There was a tremulous movement in Ruth's fingers that was scarcely a return squeeze, but was yet sufficient encouragement to induce me to snatch a blissful salute (as you lads might call it) under the mistletoe berries in the hall before "A Merry Christmas!" came to be wished to the musical accompaniment of a Christmas peal on the church bells.

But it was not until after the Christmas morning service in the old church that my happiness was crowned by Ruth Aylmer. It may not be romantic to associate the savoury incense of roast goose with love, nor the purple nose of a time-honoured beadle with the torch of Hymen. Yet to this day the scent of that relishable dish and the sight of the most portentous of ecclesiastical dignitaries will recall the memorable Christmas Day of the long-ago to one who in those days were a David-Copperfieldian kind of hat and habit, and who had fallen over head and ears in love with bewitching Ruth Aylmer, drawn to the life in her beplumed Queen Caroline bonnet and cloak of amplest dimensions. Glance once more at the drawing. Prominent as young Jack Aylmer and little Mistress Lockyer are in the foreground, their inmost affections are too much wrapped up in mince-pies and plum-pudding as yet to enchain your attention. Then, merry Mr. and Mrs. Aylmer and their friends the Lockyers, crossing hands as in Sir Roger de Coverley on Christmas Eve, whilst they exchange all the good wishes of the season, after dropping a silver souvenir each into the cap-like palm of Joe Priddle, the beadle—they are a good way through the second volume of their life-romance just as Grandame Aylmer yonder is not far from her final page, but yet bears up merrily and bravely as the best of them. With regard to the young couple in the background, I need only add that the Christmas morning greeting—a shake-hands which made one heart tingle with rapture, I can vouch for—was followed by a delightful walk home in the snow, and by Ruth Aylmer's roguish avowal that she had flirted with Beau Barber ("sound asleep in bed still, I'll warrant!" laughingly quoth she), only to provoke me into a declaration; and, for my part, I am bound to confess that whatever may be the quiet advantages of "popping the question" in the Whispering Gallery of St. Paul's, or while ascending the Monument, or whatever furtive charm there may be to a business man in coming to the point in a hansom cab, I was quite content with plighting my troth on the way home from church on Christmas morning to your grandame, who is still here, hale and hearty, lads, to help me revive for your enjoyment a merry old Christmas of George the Fourth's time. Only—no crutches or toothpicks, mind!—

PHILIP.

PUZZLE

O list to my delicious whole,
And let it penetrate your soul;
Else, with my head off, I may take you
Leagues off, and to a jelly shake you.
Another letter gone, and I
Am welcomed as a staunch ally;
And then again throughout the land
There comes a cry to stay my hand.
A liquid letter gone, I hear
Myself in Scottish accents dear—
Sweeter than sweetest note of bird,
From lovers' whispering lips when heard.
From one more letter shaken free,
You'll find warm welcome then in me.



THE MARCH OF SCIENCE: ELECTRICITY AT CHRISTMAS.

DRAWN BY H. FURNISS.



TIRED OUT.
DRAWN BY KATE GREENAWAY.

THE FIRES OF ST. JOHN.

BY KATHARINE S. MACQUOID.

CHAPTER I.

A LOVERS' QUARREL.

It had been a wild day at Le Conquet. The sky, when it could be seen, was blue and clear; but grey storm-clouds had so continually been blown across it that sometimes a leaden canopy had covered it altogether, and the atmosphere had been given up to storm and wind. Towards midday, however, the clouds bulged downwards, their colour deepened into blackness, and first heavy drops, and then sheets of diagonal rain swept over the wild rocks that stretched out long thirsty tongues into the sea. The wind, which had careered madly all round the compass, was now due west, and streams of rain swept landwards along the rocky points till they reached the low cliffs that formed the coast line.

Then the rain ceased for a while, and a vivid flash of lightning brought thunder as a rolling chorus, which drowned even the roaring of the angry turbid sea with its deeper notes. Then the sky became black as night; the rain dashed down, again and again; and the lightning scorched the air into a dry silence. All was quiet now, except for low growls of thunder far away, and quick-moving masses of grey vapour, which seemed to float as veils to the dazzling whiteness of the clouds above them lying on the clear blue.

"It is over; there will be no more storm," said a deep voice.

The speaker rose from the point of rock on which he had been sitting and stood out against the pale grey of the horizon, looking even taller and bigger than he really was. His face was brown and weather-beaten, with deep-set, honest, dark eyes, and good white teeth, which showed just now as he smiled at his companions. His hair was much shorter than that of most western Bretons, and his large white collar gave him a trim, clean aspect. He wore a black jacket and dark blue trousers and a black woollen cap. His companions, a middle-aged woman and her daughter, a girl of twenty, wore black gowns, and white square linen caps, in form resembling those of the women of Quimper. The elder woman had evidently been fair and handsome; her eyes were still very blue, but her face was now a dull uniform pink, and without expression. There was no likeness between the young girl and her mother. Marie Gourin was short, dark-eyed, and plump, with a world of sparkling mischief in her loving brown eyes and sweet rosy mouth.

She looked up saucily at the fisherman spoke.

"What a thing it is, to be sure, to be a fisherman. I believe Jehan is never really off the sea," she said to her mother; "he is always thinking of the weather."

Jehan's manly face had gone back into its usual expression of grave thought, and this expression deepened into melancholy as he looked down into Marie's bright eyes.

Instead of answering her, he turned round to the older woman, who sat gazing placidly over the sea.

The storm had scarcely stirred Barba Gourin; she took it as she took all existence now—placidity. "It was meant to happen," she always said. "What need to be glad or sorry?"

It seemed to Barba that a woman's life had two periods—the period of gaiety and freedom before marriage, and ever after a time of drudgery and dull slavish toil. So when neighbours bade Barba rebuke and check Marie's coquetry and somewhat wild spirits, she used to shake her head and smile.

"Time enough," she thought, in her placid way, "when Marie marries Jehan and has to work for him and maybe for six children. Work will clip my child's wings and dim her brightness soon enough. Why should I check her? Everything will be as it was meant to happen."

"Mother!"—Barba looked round at Jehan when he spoke. He did not let his eyes stray once to Marie's bright face, though he knew that she was watching him—"Mother, when I next come home, if I come home safe, will you give me Marie? I shall not take her from you," he went on. "I want a mother as well as a wife, and you will be company for Marie when I am away fishing. I must be away before the feast of St. John, and I cannot hope to see you again till Christmas-tide, for you know the fishing lasts six months. Will you give Marie to me when Christmas-tide is over?"

Barba's face was paler, but otherwise she betrayed no sign of emotion.

"One time will be as good as another," she said; "but, Jehan, I shall not live with you. Young folks are best by themselves."

Jehan had turned away. He was watching Marie now; for the girl had risen and was walking away from the rocks, going homewards.

Barba went on, in a monotonous voice, "So you must say where you mean to live, that we may get your home ready for you. Marie will have plenty of linen; there is mine, and my mother's, and my husband's mother's also; and there is all that I have spun for Marie. You will tell me your wishes before you go Jehan."

"Yes, yes!"—he spoke impatiently, his eyes fixed on Marie, for the girl was nearly out of sight—"where is Marie going, mother! What ails her, to leave us in this manner?"

Barba was not offended by his inattention. She looked on mankind as a superior race, and though she had just calmly pronounced her own doom, and her words had torn her heart as she spoke them, it seemed only natural that Jehan should not care for her feelings.

"Go after Marie, my son," she said, quietly. "I cannot run fast now. She should not walk alone in the evening. You can bring her back to me."

Jehan was off at once. Marie and her mother were so inseparable that he had rarely found a chance of speaking a word alone to his beloved; and he had some very special words to speak this evening.

Marie heard his heavy footsteps as he plunged over the waste ground beyond the rocks; but she walked steadily on, without so much as turning her head, which she carried more erect than usual.

"Marie!" Jehan gasped, as he reached her side.

She gave him a quick glance; but he saw that she pouted and frowned.

"Where have you left my mother, Jehan? I will go and find her."

But Jehan placed himself in her way as she turned back.

"What is it, Marie? Why do you run away from me? Are you vexed?" But he spoke it firmly—not as if he had caused her vexation.

"Yes, I am vexed"—bright tears sprang to her eyes—"and no wonder. I am not a cow or a sheep, Monsieur Jehan. Kerrec, though you seem to think I am. Suppose I say, when you come home from the fishing, that I am not so ready to marry as you seem to think—that I will not give up my freedom? How, then?"

He caught at both her hands and held them fast, though she tried to pull them away.

"Marie," he said, in a tender, stealing voice, that seemed hardly to belong to his powerful body, "you are not in earnest—tell me you are not angry with me, sweet one."

Marie was panting still with vexation. At first it had been as Jehan said. She had affected anger, for the dear delight of teasing her lover, that he might coax her into sweetness; but Jehan's masterful manner, and, as she secretly called it, his "audacious security" of her love, had really alarmed her pride, and had roused the half-savage modesty of her nature.

"Let me go," she said, struggling, her face reddening with her efforts. "I do not want you at all."

But Jehan still held her fast, and his eyes burned with a somewhat fiery light.

"I will let you go in a moment," he said, so firmly and quietly that the girl stood still and looked at him in surprise; "but first I want to know this—do you love me, Marie, or do you refuse to be my wife when I come home at Christmas-tide?"

Marie looked cross. "You are tiresome," she said. "I told you just now I am not in haste to marry. I am gay and happy and free. I don't want to change my state too soon."

He dropped her hands suddenly.

"Good-by, Marie," he said, in a hoarse, choked voice, that struck sharply into the girl's heart. "All this time I thought you really loved me—oh why," he said bitterly, "did you not say all this sooner?"

Marie hung her head. Jehan waited; then, finding she did not speak, he went on—

"Why did I speak out suddenly to your mother instead of to you? Why, because I could not bear to tell you, Marie, that this was our last time together. I shrank from paining you. Holy Virgin! I deceived myself. I need not have thought of your feelings. I shrank from telling you, and so I spoke to your mother. How could I doubt your love, girl—had you not promised to be my wife?"

He paused again, but Marie was silent, and she stood with her head turned from him. Jehan went on,

"I only wanted to say good-by, Marie, for I must start for the fishing to-morrow."

He said the last words indifferently. There was still no answer. He turned away, while Marie stood as still as one of the grey blocks on the stone-cumbered heath near the village.

Barba had not hurried her steps; she knew that Jehan wanted a few words alone with Marie, and also she wanted a few moments in which to recover her wonted calm. She had known long ago that it must come to this; she had watched the growth of the fisherman's love, and had seen that his presence troubled Marie's quiet. He had been at home for a longer spell than usual, and some weeks ago Jehan had spoken to her, and the lovers had been formally betrothed in the presence of Marie's relatives and of Jehan's blind uncle Michel, who had brought him up from childhood. Barba had realised that she must part from her daughter; but still her heart felt very lonely. Spite of her resignation to life and its changes, she could not determine to live with Marie's husband. Her child had been her all, and she thought separation would be less painful than seeing another set in her place in her daughter's affection. Then Jehan, when they were married, would go away for the fishing, and Marie would come and be her own child again in a way she never could be if once Barba gave up a home of her own. She went over this reasoning dully to herself, but comfort did not come; and finally she looked after the lovers, and was surprised to see Marie standing by herself.

Barba felt troubled as well as surprised. What could have happened to part these two so suddenly, for Jehan always went back with them to their cottage door, and sometimes he came in and shared their frugal supper of porridge and butter-milk.

She hurried on, stumbling over the uneven ground—for she was usually a slow-moving woman—till she had nearly reached her daughter, and she called out, "Marie!"

The noise of the waves breaking against the rock ridges was less distinct here, and sounded like a far-off hoarse murmur. Marie started and turned when her mother's voice struck sharply on her ear. The girl looked round, and her mother saw how white and sad was the girl's face.

"Oh, mother!"—she grasped Barba's arm—"go fast; go and tell Jehan I did not mean what I said. No! that is like asking him to marry me. Mother, say only this, that Marie would like to say good-by to him before he goes away."

Barba stood an instant questioning her child's face, and she saw the pain in it was real. Marie clasped her hands and looked imploringly; and, without a word of remonstrance, the mother hurried on into the fast-darkening village, though Jehan Kerrec had passed out of sight.

Marie waited till she grew afraid of being there alone in the gloom so near the ruined Abbey, and then she turned sadly to follow her mother.

As she moved she saw some one rise from behind a huge grey block of stone.

"Good evening, Marie. You are out late. Shall I walk home with you?"

A stout, good-tempered looking man, dressed like a Breton farmer, with long jacket, many-buttoned waistcoat, and bag-shaped breeches, was standing beside her with a half-pitying look on his face.

"No, thank you, Monsieur Mellac," said Marie, decidedly. "I am not alone; my mother is on in front;" and she ran off.

CHAPTER II.

AN ACCIDENT, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

Christmas-tide came in the little sea-washed village, but Jehan Kerrec did not appear to claim Marie for his wife.

A fortnight passed, and still there were no tidings of him. Marie looked pale and sad; her eyes were red, as if with constant crying; and, instead of her saucy, erect way of holding herself, she went about with a bent head, and looked thoroughly dejected.

Barba, too, was troubled out of her quiet steadfastness. She had not seen Jehan again, but he had left instructions with his cousin Michel; and Madame Gourin had secured, some weeks ago, the cottage Jehan had fixed on, and had settled with the owner, Monsieur Louis Mellac, that the rent was to be paid from the beginning of the year.

If anything happened to Jehan Kerrec, she was the responsible tenant, and Mellac would look to her for his rent when the end of the month came.

The end of the third week had arrived, and she sat one evening beside her hearth in anxious thought.

Barba's cottage was two-roomed, mud-floored, and low-roofed, with a huge beam across the living-room, on which hung a bladder of lard, some dried herbs, and a bundle of dingy-looking galettes. A few sticks burned on the open hearth, and over them an iron pot hung suspended from a hook in the chimney. Barba sat on a long oaken settle placed beneath one of the box beds contrived in the wall, which showed on each side of the fireplace about midway between floor and roof. She sighed, and then, hearing a noise, she looked round for Marie. But the girl was still busy in the other room, which opened out of this one, and in which the cows and pigs slept, and were sheltered in rainy weather. Next

minute Barba saw the outside half-door open, and a man's head peered forward into the room. She thought it was Jehan and she started up, moved out of her customary self-restraint. But before a sound escaped her, a stout, square-built man, a good head shorter than Jehan Kerrec, had come leisurely in.

"Good evening, neighbour; at your service." And then Barba saw that it was Louis Mellac. What could he want? Surely he would not ask for his rent a week before it was due; he a rich man, too, about the most prosperous farmer in the neighbourhood. No blight struck his buckwheat, no rain fell while his grass was gathered in, and so far the evil eye had not brought disease on his cattle. He was the fortunate man in the little lonely village; and if she had not dreaded the coming rent-day, she would have looked on his visit as an honour to be proud of.

She smiled as she returned his greeting, and asked him to be seated.

Mellac placed himself on the opposite settle, and then looked round with searching glances into the dark corners of the room farthest from the hearth.

"Where is Marie?" he said, in a low voice.

"She is with her cow. She loves the poor beast, and is never tired of caring for it. She has been out to get fresh green food for the creature."

"She looks sad," said Mellac, fixing his eyes on the mother's face.

Barba felt troubled. So far she had repelled any sympathy that had been offered by her neighbours. She said it was too soon to form doubts and conjectures. Jehan Kerrec would come back all in good time, and then the wedding would take place. So now she looked stolidly at Monsieur Mellac, and answered indifferently,

"Do you think so, neighbour?"

Mellac smiled; he looked round the cottage again, and then he crossed over and placed himself by Barba's side.

Barba's face showed no surprise, but she kept her eyes fixed on her visitor.

"You are a clever woman," he said, speaking low, "and you are a good mother, Barba Gourin; but there is such a thing as being too clever—saddling yourself with another cottage, for instance, which you do not mean to live in, and the rent of which you will find it hard to pay." He stopped, and looked at her triumphantly.

Barba's face was as stolid as ever. "I do not understand you," she said; "I took the cottage for Jehan Kerrec—he is coming home to marry my daughter."

Mellac's eyes sparkled.

"We are alone," he said; "and, if you speak low, no one can overhear us. Why do you persist in this deception to me? I know that you do it publicly because you are a good mother anxious to save her child's good name; but for all that you need not have taken the cottage."

Barba's blue eyes grew rounder, but she showed no other surprise.

"You are mistaken, neighbour. Jehan Kerrec wished the cottage to be ready against the time when he should come back to marry Marie."

The farmer started up with an oath. He placed himself in front of Barba, and bent down so that he could speak into her ear.

"Listen," he said; "I know the truth. The night before Jehan Kerrec started for Douarnenez I was on the heath near the ruined abbey, and I saw him with your daughter. Though it was late, she was alone with him, Barba Gourin; and he parted from her in anger. Now, if a girl walks alone with a man and he afterwards deserts her, it is plain that he is tired of her—that he flings her off; and that is why I say that you are a clever woman to have kept the matter so close, and to have made all the village believe that Jehan meant to come back to marry your daughter. Yes, you are clever; but you did too much when you took the cottage for a year."

Barba had sat as still as the oak settle. She felt stupefied. She knew Marie had gone out early to say farewell to Jehan the morning he went away; but the girl had begged her mother not to accompany her, and Barba had not seen the parting. She had never questioned Marie about her quarrel with her lover; and, though she sought for him that night, she did not find him. She had received his instructions, written, on a slip of paper, which he left in charge of his blind cousin.

Thought passed very slowly through the brain of Barba Gourin; but as she sat now, stunned by the charge brought against her daughter, she remembered the bit of writing, and she saw what a powerful witness it was to the truth of the proposed marriage.

She looked up at the farmer, and the steadfast light in her eyes gave him some alarm. He had thought his charge would overwhelm her.

"You are mistaken, Monsieur Mellac," she said. "Marie and Jehan Kerrec saw one another the morning he went away, and they parted—good friends; and, besides, he left me a paper of instructions about the cottage and other things."

A deep red flush spread over the farmer's broad face. Barba saw the eager interest in his eyes, but she never could entertain two thoughts at once, and she was so bent on proving herself in the right that she had no room for an idea of suspicion.

"Oh!" he said. "Is that so?" He looked keenly at her, but Barba showed no emotion. "Or is this another pious deception to save your daughter's credit. Of course you will not object to show me the paper you say Jehan Kerrec wrote for you. If you have that you are not my tenant; it will prove that he instructed you to take the cottage in his name."

Barba saw this more quickly than usual. She went so far as to wonder that she had not taken comfort in this proof of Jehan's responsibility.

"I will show it to you," she said; and, crossing over, she opened the door of a tall, dark, wooden press, and then a drawer inside it. She came back to the farmer with a slip of paper, and put it in his hand.

Louis Mellac bent his head and tried to read it.

"Your room is dark," he said, "and the writing is bad. I cannot make it out."

And, indeed, the room was dark. There was only one small window, and the light that came in through the aperture between the low, round-headed doorway and the half door.

Barba took up a log and struck the wood on the hearth till it suddenly blazed, and a shower of sparks flew upward.

"I thank you," Mellac said; and he bent low over the flame and read the paper, muttering the words as he did so.

"Holy Virgin!" he exclaimed, "I am unlucky;" and he plunged his hand seemingly into the fire. His back was towards Barba, and for a moment she stood still, not realising what had happened. "Great Heavens!" said Mellac, "the paper has fallen into the fire. Do you set much store by it?"

He turned and looked at her.

Barba pushed forward and bent closely over the flame, but the paper had shrivelled into a black fragment with a fiery edge. Still, she thrust in her hand between the burning logs and seized it, but it crumbled between her fingers.

"It is not of much consequence," said Mellac, in a questioning voice.

Barba had recovered her usual calm.

"No," she said, "it matters little, because you have seen it, and you know that it is to Jehan Kerrec you have to look for the payment of your rent. It was on account of you I kept the paper. It has made you see plainly that Jehan is coming home to marry Marie."

Her blue eyes grew round again as she looked at him; for Louis Mellac stood shaking his head, and his face was utterly incredulous.

"No," he said, in answer to her stare of surprise; "I prefer to believe what I saw that night. What proof have I that the paper you showed me was really in Kerrec's handwriting? What do I know? It is possible that he does not even know how to write."

At this the stolid Barba roused and looked at the well-to-do farmer with a keenness of expression he had never before noted in her eyes.

"What is your meaning, Monsieur Mellac?" she said. "You have something more to say to me. You did not come here only to tell me I had been deceived."

Mellac again looked round him.

"Are you sure we are alone?" he said. "I have something to say, but it is only for your ears at present."

Barba went to the door that led into the cow-stable and listened. Then she opened it and looked in. "Marie!" she said.

There was no answer.

"You can speak freely," she said, when, after closing the door, she came back to the settle beside the hearth. "Marie has gone outside."

"Well, then,"—but Mellac still spoke in a low voice—"I tell you that Jehan Kerrec will not come back; so that, besides the cottage, you will also have Marie on your hands. By-and-by you will find out that it is not only I who saw her part from her lover in anger, the whole village will proclaim that she is cast off by him."

Barba's pink skin had reddened at last.

"It is false," she said, sternly; "and you know it is false. For what reason could he cast off my Marie?"

Mellac shrugged his shoulders.

"You ask the very question which I cannot answer; but I'll be bound, when once the thing gets wind, there will be plenty who can furnish a good reason for Jehan's desertion. There are things which are hard to say to a mother."

Barba looked stolid again; she felt contemptuous; but caution warned her that it was foolish to make an enemy of Mellac while the cottage remained in her possession.

"What else have you to say, Monsieur?" she asked, coldly. Mellac felt the change in her voice.

"I want to be your friend, if you will let me," he said. "I know as well as you do that Marie is good and honest; but it looks ill for a girl to be deserted, and the best way to shut people's mouths is to give them something new to gossip about. Listen, then. I am willing to marry Marie. Will you have me for a son-in-law? That will make everything right."

The firelight showed Barba's face and white cap vividly in the darkened room. She was staring fixedly; she almost gasped with surprise.

"You!" she said at last. "You, a rich man; besides, you are twenty years older than the child."

"And for that reason better able to take care of her. Listen, Barba Gourin. I can give Marie a good home, plenty of clothes, a cart to ride in, and a servant to fetch water and do the hard work, and I know Marie shrinks from work. I can give you many comforts that Jehan Kerrec could never furnish if he lived to be a hundred."

Barba put up her hand to stop him.

"Peace!" she said. "You are going too fast, neighbour. I must think. I must be quite sure about Jehan Kerrec. Leave me now."

CHAPTER III.

HIS WIFE OR HIS WIDOW.

Louis Mellac went away, and left Barba sitting beside her fire. She felt uneasy—quite unlike herself. All through the years that had gone she had said, "Things happened because they were meant to happen;" and it had troubled her that there was so large an element of adventurousness in the loves of Marie and Jehan. It would have seemed more natural for her child to have become attached to one of the lads of her own village than to Jehan Kerrec, who had come there but twice to see his old blind cousin. This offer of Louis Mellac's was a far more natural and common-place arrangement; and yet Barba was troubled.

"I am a fool!" she said, at last, "and, what is worse, I did not know I was one. It is because of a fancy I have taken against Mellac, and because he did not say he loved Marie; it seemed as if he wanted her more from pity than from love."

Barba sighed. She had married without love, to please her parents, and she had hoped for a happier lot for Marie.

The latch of the cow-house lifted, and Marie came in. She seated herself on a stool beside her mother, and looked wearily into the fire.

Barba put one hand on her child's head. She was not addicted to caresses, and just now the poor girl's heart longed sorely for love. She drew her mother's brown hand to her lips and kissed it, and Barba felt a tear on the girl's cheek.

"Child," she said, "we must give up hope. I fear Jehan must have been lost at the fishing. He is surely dead."

Marie looked up. Her face was white and eager, and her eyes were full of dark light.

"He is not dead to me," she said, passionately. "He is my husband, and, mother, he will come back."

Barba sate still; she knew that it was useless to strive with Marie in this mood, but still she knew, too, that her words though unheeded at the time, were often accepted later on by her daughter. They sate silent some time before she again spoke.

"Child," she said, gently, "I mean that it is more seemly to give up the appearance of hope; it is better that I should lock up the cottage, or try to let it, and that you should give up the hope of marrying Jehan. It is fretting your life away to go on in vain expectation."

Marie started up, and began to pace the long dark room. At last she stopped and knelt down before her mother.

"Oh, mother," she cried—but there were no sobs or tears, though her face was white and wrung with anguish—"do not tempt me. I have sworn to-day, at the foot of the blessed Cross, that I will give up my self-will, and yet I felt but now as if I could strike you for quenching my hope. Mother, I heard sad news this day. I have seen Mathurin, the driver from Pont Croix, and he says"—she stopped and pressed her hands tightly together—"he says last time the boats came in two were missing, and one of them was Jehan's." She went up to the wall and leaned her face against it, but she could not sob or cry—her heart felt hard, and seemed to stifle her with its weight.

"Where is Mathurin?" said Barba, and she rose up and went towards the door.

Marie looked round in surprise. Though her grief made

her feel dead and cold to all else, still, she had been so used to her mother's sympathy, that it seemed strange to see her going away without one word of comfort for her.

"He is gone," she answered. "I only saw him as he was driving out of the village with some travellers; but, mother, it is not true—I feel it is not."

Barba sate still; she could not say so to Marie just now, but it seemed to her that it was better to think of Jehan as dead than as faithless.

All at once Marie turned round.

"It is my punishment," she said; "if Jehan is taken from me I deserve it. I was so wilful to him always. I never thought of his feelings, only of my own."

Barba sate listening, and her face grew troubled.

"Marie"—her mother's voice startled her—"you and Jehan parted friends, did you not?"

The girl looked at her earnestly.

"I thank God and the Blessed Virgin we did, mother, though it was more than I deserved, for I had tormented him. I behaved so ill that night when he left me that I wonder he forgave me."

Had he forgiven Marie? Barba asked herself. His boat might not have come back, but he might not be drowned for all that. Suppose Louis Mellac was right. Jehan might have landed in some other fishing town, and they might never again hear of him. At St. Matthieu news was never heard, unless, indeed, by a chance like that of to-day, when Mathurin, or some other driver, passed through the village, taking English travellers round the coast. As a rule, news had become history before it reached the little lonely place, from which none but the fishermen ever travelled.

"Mother, what do you think?" the girl said at last, unable to bear the silence.

Then Barba got up and kissed her daughter's pale stricken face.

"I think that you must listen to me, my child. Whether Jehan has perished or not, I do not think he will come back, and I cannot think that my Marie will care to have the children pointing at her as they used to point at poor mad Genevieve."

Marie shuddered and turned away; but it seemed to her as if she saw the wild eyes and unkempt, uncovered head of the poor woman who had gone mad when her lover was lost at sea twenty years before. She made no answer, and her mother went on.

"We must take the things out of the cottage. Jehan's cousin, Michel, will help us to take care of them, and we must give up the cottage to Monsieur Mellac."

Marie turned slowly round and looked at her mother. "Do you mean," she began—

But Barba kept her eyes fixed on the wall before her. She knew that if once she let feeling get the upper hand Marie's will would rule.

"I mean," she said, in a dull, monotonous voice, "that it is best for you, my daughter, that we should both try to forget Jehan Kerrec."

Marie's eyes were full of sad protest, but her mother's face checked her. It seemed to the girl that her sorrow was flung back upon her; henceforth she must bear it alone. Her mother had never been demonstrative in her sympathy, but the girl had felt that it lay there ready for her when she chose to seek it. What had happened to change her mother's love?

But the vow she had taken against her self-will held back the angry words that rose on her lips. She turned a pale sad face towards Barba.

"You can forget him," she said. "You have forgotten him, or you could not speak so; but I am his wife in God's sight, and if, indeed, he has departed, I am his widow."

"It is useless to fight with Providence," Barba had gone back to her staff. "It was meant to happen—there is no more to be said."

Marie only sighed. She felt deeply, almost bitterly, that no more could be said about Jehan to her mother.

CHAPTER IV.

BESIDE THE FOUNTAIN.

After that night a great change showed itself in Marie Gourin. Her bright archness, the saucy butterfly ways which had made her so popular in the little village, were scarcely ever apparent. The only time when she sparkled into one of her old smiles was when she was trying to cheer Jehan's blind uncle Michel.

She and her mother never spoke of Jehan. Louis Mellac came often to the cottage, but he usually talked to Barba, and Marie had not guessed that his visits were meant for her. He promised Barba that he would find a tenant for his cottage, and she put away her anxiety. Marie must not be hurried, she thought; but surely this marriage with Monsieur Mellac would be the best possible arrangement. "It was meant to happen;" and Barba repeated this till she believed she was piously doing God's will in encouraging the hopes of the rich farmer.

It was a warm evening in June, and Barba sate in her cottage spinning, thinking over Mellac's suit, and wondering how all would end. All at once she heard a step outside, and she left her spinning and went to the door to meet her visitor.

He came into the cottage with a determined look on his face, and seated himself.

"Marie has waited long enough," he said, without any greeting to Madame Gourin.

Barba was startled out of her dream of security as he went on, roughly, "I have been doing all I can to please and comfort you, neighbour. Most landlords would have asked for their rent at the quarter; but if Marie is to be my wife there need be no question of rent between you and me. But now it is time for you to try to please me in this matter."

Marie had said that her mother had forgotten Jehan; and, truly, Barba had tried to forget her own affection for the true and generous-hearted young fisherman; but at these words it seemed to her that Jehan Kerrec stood before her, his dark eyes full of mournful reproach. He had never said a rough word to her. Involuntarily she crossed herself and murmured an ejaculatory prayer.

Mellac started.

"What do you see?" he said. "You looked as if you saw the Ankou beside the hearth."

Barba shook her head.

"I see nothing present," she said. "Your words alarm me. I fear you are over-hasty. Marie is still so young."

The farmer rose. His face looked hard and stolid, as usual, but there was menace in his small sunken eyes.

"Bah! I am tired of excuses, Barba Gourin. I mean to wed Marie; and therefore, if you shrink from telling her so, I will tell her myself. You can choose. Tell her to-night, or I shall tell her to-morrow," he said, roughly.

Barba hesitated; but the farmer's face told her that she must yield.

"I will do your bidding," she said, simply; and Louis Mellac walked out of the house without so much as saying good evening to her.

Barba sate with her hands in her lap till Marie came in, and then she roused and told her daughter of Mellac's proposal.

The girl listened, looked hard at Barba to be sure she was in earnest, and then she gave a sad smile.

"Mother," she said, "Jehan is not dead. I cannot wed Louis Mellac while my heart is with Jehan Kerrec."

Barba gave her back a scared look that startled Marie.

"Child!" she said; "but now while I listened to Monsieur Mellac, I saw Jehan; he passed by me with the sad smile of the departed. Stay, Marie"—the girl shook her head incredulously, but Barba laid her hand solemnly on her arm—"it is that that makes me sure. When my mother was young she too lost her lover, and she went a long journey beyond Douarnenez, even to the shores of the Baie de Trépassés. There she waited as long as she dared, for it is a perilous thing to do. She watched one misty shape after another assemble at the edge of the water and wave long, shadow-like arms to hasten the boatman who plies between that fatal shore and the Isle de Sein; but she did not see her lover. She told me he was perhaps there after all, for every face she gazed on wore so subdued and sad a smile that she could not distinguish one from another—they seemed but mournful repetitions of the same face; and for this reason I know that Jehan is among those who have left us."

Marie stood thinking. She had heard this story before; but that was when her heart had been hardened against sad impressions by present happiness. A wild idea of going to the shore of the departed now thrilled through her. It seemed to her that she would recognise her beloved among the sad faces, however many there might be, and then hope rose and told her it was folly to seek Jehan among the dead.

"When did you think you saw him?" she asked, abruptly.

"Just before you came in. I will tell you all the truth, Marie. I will not deceive you in any way. Louis Mellac has long loved you. He has often asked me to speak to you for him, and I have said no, and bid him wait; but to-night he said he would wait no longer, and then all at once I saw Jehan's pale sad face."

Marie broke in impetuously,

"You saw Jehan—yes, and what did that mean? Mother, you are wise for other people's visions, but you cannot read your own. Jehan's face was shown you to remind you of him, to bid you beware of giving his promised wife to another man, for I am no longer yours to give. You gave me to Jehan," the girl said, passionately. "I am his—his only here, and for ever. Mother, I am his—maid, wife, or widow. I can never put anyone in the place of my love; there is no place here"—she put her hand softly on her heart—"he fills me."

Barba did not look angry, she had prepared herself for resistance; but there was a despairing ring in her voice, when she answered.

"You must have your will, Marie; you have always pleased yourself. But I must tell you all, so that you may choose with open eyes. If you will not marry Monsieur Mellac, we must either beg or we must go to service."

Marie fixed wondering eyes on her mother.

"What do you mean?" she said. "The cottage is ours, and we have the cow, and the rest. Nothing is changed with us."

"I must pay the rent of the cottage for Jehan, and Monsieur Mellac says I must pay also for repairs which Jehan said must be made. I have no money, Marie. We have nothing beyond our daily needs. If we pay Louis Mellac, we must sell all we have and work for others."

Marie was silent. In her inexperience it seemed to her that nothing could be a hardship that was done for the sake of Jehan; but she could not let her mother suffer.

Presently she raised her head. "You must let me think," she said. "Perhaps my way will be made clear. I will tell you to-morrow."

She went up to her mother and held her forehead for the usual kiss, but Barba put both arms round the girl.

"My child," she whispered, "it is not for myself I urge this, but I long to see thee rich and happy."

Marie threw back her head so that she might look up in her mother's face. There were tears in her dark eyes, but Barba was surprised to see some of the old sparkle in the girl's face.

"Riches and happiness are not always found in company, dear mother. Riches wants so much, and happiness can do with so little. But good-night, mother, dear."

Marie was soon in one of the box beds that stood on each side the fire-place, but she did not get to sleep. She was a great believer in dreams; and, as she had prayed devoutly before she lay down, it seemed to her that an answer would probably come to her in sleep. She could not wed Louis Mellac, but some other way would be shown out of her perplexity. She fell off at last into heavy dreamless slumber.

Marie rubbed her eyes when she awoke. Her last idea as she fell asleep recurred as she looked round her; but all was blank. Nothing had come to her during sleep. The talk with her mother had not been effaced by any hopeful dream. Every word of it was fixed in her memory.

She got up earlier than usual; and, without disturbing Barba, she took a tall red earthen pitcher and went out of the house.

The village stood on a point of land almost surrounded by the sea; but the country behind the village was wooded, and not very far from Barba Gourin's cottage there was a ruined fountain of ancient date, with a niche holding an image of the saint to whom the spring had been dedicated. A broken wall had once extended round the fountain, and it still measured a square space shaded by trees. The steps which led down to this damp retreat were moss-grown and broken; but between the fissures tufts of lady fern and black spleenwort had secured a footing, and looked bright as the morning sun shone down on them through the branches overhead.

Marie tripped down quickly; but she came up the steps more slowly, for she had taken a pail as well as the tall red pitcher, and the water brimmed over as she left the fountain.

She sighed. Ah, how Jehan used to lie in wait, always ready to carry home her pails for her, and how hard she had been; she had rarely indulged him in ever so short a talk, but had always hurried home, with, perhaps, scarcely a smile of thanks for his trouble.

"I did not deserve his love," she said, "and it has been taken away."

Something made her look up, and she saw Louis Mellac. He must have been concealed among the trees, Marie thought; she felt sure no one could have come down the green lane which led from the high road to the fountain. She turned pale, for she guessed his purpose.

"Good morning, Marie," he said; "that is a heavy pail—let me take it."

"No, thank you;" and, as Marie held it firmly and Louis Mellac tried to take it from her hand, the water splashed out and filled his sabots.

He muttered an ugly sounding word, but he forced a smile.

"Come, let me have it, little one," he said. "I am stronger than you."

But it seemed to Marie that she could not let the farmer do for her what Jehan had done. It would be putting him in her lover's place.

(Continued on page 31.)



WELCOME HOME.
DRAWN BY C. J. STANILAND.



AFTER CHURCH: THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE SEASON.

DRAWN BY F. BARNARD.

THE MISTLETOE SPRIG OF OLDSTONE HALL.

(From the Oldstone Chronicles.)

BY F. C. BURNAND.

They were asked down to Oldstone by the Baronet and his lady,—grandpapa and grandmamma. Two coaches full; one held the Barton Gilpins, bringing Miss Constance Greville, and the other brought Squire Tull and his family, with young Ned Tull, Sir Marmaduke Oldstone's grandson.

Ned would have preferred a Christmas in town had he not heard of Miss Constance being expected, and as he looked out of the postchaise, in which, with his portly parents, he had a far from comfortable seat, he scarcely congratulated himself on having relinquished the dissipations of the metropolis on seeing Miss Constance, listening demurely enough, if attitude went for anything, to the remarks of a young dandy recently come in from riding.

What he was saying Ned Tull hadn't an idea. What he himself, Ned Tull, would have been saying in a similar position, was as clear as possible.

"Constance must be won this Christmas Eve" muttered Ned to himself, as, on the chariot turning the corner, he obtained a more distinct view of the youthful beau who was paying most assiduous court to the lady in question.

"He looks an empty conceited fellow," said Ned to himself as he gave his ruffles a shake, and settled his cravat.

The Gilpins were settling down. Such a family! Barton Gilpin, High Sheriff of his county, had married Miss Lætitia Oldstone some ten years ago, and several little Gilpins had been among the results.

Constance Greville was a sort of relation of the Gilpins—"the sort" being a very poor one. She was the daughter of a country clergyman who was "passing rich"—or *parson* rich—on a very small sum; and so his comely daughter had to give her services as governess where there was some chance of remuneration, and, at all events, a certainty of relieving the family at home by her enforced absence.

Constance was the dearest little thing in the world, as any of my readers may see from the illustration; and was the cheapest little thing in the house, as anyone, acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Barton Gilpin's establishment of seven children, would soon have ascertained.

Education was not at high pressure then, as it is now, but human nature was pretty much the same; and the Barton Gilpins—for all their fine house, splendid liveries, and influential connections—were not less pleased than other generous spirits at getting as much as they could for as little as possible.

If Constance was their poor relation, they were her "near" relations—very near indeed. Be this as it may, Constance was included in the invitation; for, somehow or other, Lady Oldstone, the kindest old gentlewoman possible, had heard a sort of whisper of Ned Tull having suddenly discovered under his enormous waistcoat and resplendent frill a something which seemed to trouble him considerably, and which my Lady concluded was most certainly a warm, impressionable heart.

The young man, for all his pleasure-loving, pleasure-seeking temperament, was well-disposed enough, and, being also well-to-do, would soon be well disposed of. He was free to choose, and had enough and to spare for himself and a wife of his choice, without troubling himself as to what the world might be pleased to say.

True that he was my Lady's grandson; but what of that? Sir Marmaduke had married both his daughters sufficiently well for love and money; and Ned Tull, the first issue of the first marriage, was now twenty-five years of age, while the Gilpin offspring had many many years before them ere they would be called upon to lead, or be led, to the Hymeneal altar.

Ned was a favourite of my Lady's; so was Constance; and there would be an extra provision in my Lady's last will and testament, which undoubtedly would be for their particular benefit.

Squire Tull and his wife looked higher for a daughter-in-law than a poor relation, forced to go out as a governess, and in craning their necks after the ideal they overlooked the real, which either of them could have seen, with half an eye between them, had they taken the trouble. Such being their views for a daughter-in-law, it is no wonder that they were equally ambitious for the future of their daughter Amelia Tull, who had been staying with the Gilpins, and had arrived with them in their coach. There was one other to make up the resident party at Oldstone Hall, and as he was no unimportant person in his own eyes—and not unfavourably regarded by somebody else's—he cannot be omitted here.

The Hen. Dick Pauncefort was a beau, a gay gallant, without any idea of "ranging" himself, and very strong ideas about disarranging himself. He was sufficiently rich to enable him to pass his time between town and country, enjoying both and belonging distinctly to neither.

He was emphatically a gay young bachelor, the second son of an Earl, and heir to a far more considerable property than usually falls to the lot of younger sons of noble families.

In society a beau, in the field a sportsman, a kind-hearted, careless, inconsistent sort of a person, balancing between good and evil, vain of his personal appearance, and too apt to think himself irresistible with the fair sex—"if he only took the trouble." Seeing Constance, he thought she was worth the trouble; and after a slight greeting to Amelia, who seemed dreadfully chagrined by his neglect, he commenced a flirtation on the spot with the pretty young companion, who had the merit of appealing to him as a novelty.

It was dangerous, in more ways than one. In those good old days, duelling was not by any means out of fashion, and for *les beaux yeux*, two young sparks, crossed in love, would soon find their blades crossed in anger.

Ned Tull neither knew nor cared who the dandy in the riding-coat might be; but he did know and care, very much, for the little lady in the prodigious bonnet and the enormous muff, both of which were seasonable and fashionable presents from my Lady of Oldstone Hall, while Sir Marmaduke had presented her with a stick *à la mode* and a neat little silken purse for her own private pocket, accompanied by a neat little speech for her own private ear.

So Constance's heart was glad; and no wonder there was a smile on her lips, as Dick Pauncefort, after a formal introduction, began paying his court to her in the latest style of Pops' Alley.

"I am so glad to hear we are to spend our holiday together here," observed Dick. "I hope we shall become better acquainted."

"Indeed, Sir, I hope we shall," was the maiden's simple reply.

"I trust I shall be found to improve on acquaintance, like good wine," continued the youth, smiling, and, sooth to say, not unwilling to throw out a bait for a compliment.

"Oh, I am sure you will," returned Miss Constance, so artlessly, and so readily, as to cause the slightest shade of annoyance to pass over the young man's brow.

"I am sure that Miss Constance won't," he said.

"Won't what?" she asked naïvely.

"Improve," he replied, with a look intended to convey unutterable things.

"Why not?" she asked again.

He was in for a catechism.

"Because she can't," answered the young man, rather abashed at the obscurity of his compliment.

"Can't improve!" exclaimed Miss Constantia, pretending to be horribly shocked. "Am I so bad?"

"No; pardon me—so perfect, there is no room for improvement."

She curtsied; he bowed.

Sir Marmaduke, at the door, called out,

"Here, Dick Pauncefort, let me introduce to you my grandson, Master Edward Tull. You're just about of an age, and ought to know one another."

The two young men saluted each other courteously, but rather more ceremoniously than Sir Marmaduke had expected. He was a stickler for ceremony, but not on these occasions. However, he trusted to a loving cup of spiced wine, round the cheery fire, to smooth the wrinkles and warm the hearts.

They all adjourned to the dining-room, where the butler, the men-servants, and maids, were preparing for keeping the eve in true old-fashioned style.

Christmas itself was to be magnificent, but this was just the preparation, the overture.

It was not to be a late night. There was to be no deep drinking, or long sitting, but a merry dinner, foreshadowing the Pudding, the Turkey, and the Boar's Head, which were to be in all their glory to-morrow, and a social, cheery gathering in the evening to dance until midnight, and not a minute after, so as to be ready for the duties and pleasure of the next day.

My Lady had strictly commanded her maids that, on no account, should any mistletoe appear before Christmas Day itself. That was her rule.

"Plenty of Folly, under the Holly," said the Old Lady, "on the day itself; but not before."

But Dick Pauncefort had a design.

Stealing quietly out of the drawing-room, he chose a secluded spot behind "My Grandfather's clock"—since celebrated in the ballad-lore of our country, or rather of our Town—and fixed the tiniest atom of mistletoe to the bottom of the lamp that hung in the recess.

Then he retired.

In the meantime, Ned has engaged Constance in a tête-à-tête, and has taken good care to secure her as his neighbour at dinner, and as his partner in most of the dances afterwards. Health and Happiness, and Christmas Cheer, and a Hearty Welcome to Oldstone Hall, were the toasts of the evening, the Host and Hostess were "drunk" with all the honours, and, after a brief discussion of the full-bodied port, which Squire Tull and the elders were loth to leave, but for the prospect of a midnight bowl of punch by way of a nightcap, the whole party reassembled in the drawing-room, where spinnet, fiddles, and "all kinds of music" were already tuning up for glees, carols, and the dance.

"Why," observed Squire Tull, who was in the merriest mood possible, "there's no mistletoe!"

The omission was noticed by all in various ways.

Miss Constance smiled at the fire.

Dick Pauncefort looked hard at her, which is a wrong expression in his case, as he looked anything but hard—on the contrary, remarkably soft, until, meeting Amelia Tull's glance, he seemed to be a bit ashamed of himself, and pretended to be absorbed in contemplating the decorations.

Ned Tull looked angry, and then looked foolish.

Sir Marmaduke answered his son-in-law the Squire,

"My dear John, don't you know by this time that we never do have mistletoe on Christmas Eve?"

"I never noticed its absence before," the Squire protested.

"And you don't know the story?" asked my Lady.

Well, whether he did or not, or whether they did or not, very certain it is that Sir Marmaduke was ready to give it them in rhyme, in his bluff, old, hearty voice, with a good tune and a chorus to it, too, on which he absolutely insisted. He called it

THE SPRIG OF MISTLETOE.

(From the Chronicles of Oldstone Hall.)

In Oldstone Hall there's a legend old,
The Mistletoe Kiss, 'tis writ in gold.
On a parchment scroll of an ancient date,
When the Red and White Rose were within the gate.
When Christmas Eve was kept in the way
That our forefathers kept it for many a day.
When the merry retainers a carol sang,
And the bell in the tower a welcome rang.
Sing ho! sing hey!
Be merry and gay,
With the Mistletoe Bough
In the ancient way!

CHORUS (taken up by all the guests),
Sing ho! sing hey! &c.

In Oldstone Hall, so the story goes,
Were met the friends of the pure White Rose.
And the Baron's daughter,
So fair that night
Than the pure White Rose,
Was far more white.
For in secret her wounded lover lay
A Red Rose hurt in the last affray.
And o'er the door where he lay so low
Hung a fresh-gathered sprig of mistletoe.
Sing ho! sing hey! &c.

'T was Christmas Eve,—and a White Rose Knight,
Whose eyes beamed wild with a fiendish light,
The damsel track'd—
And his arm he threw
Around her waist,
"I will take my due,
For Cupid's mistletoe hangs above,"
He cried;—but a blow from a mailed glove
Flouted his ear, and laid him low
'Neath the fresh-gathered sprig of mistletoe.
Sing ho! sing hey! &c.

The wounded lover has risen in strength;
The White Rose Knight has measured his length
On the floor. She clung
To her lover,—they fled
In the night. The Two Roses,
The White and the Red.
And lives were lost, hearts broke with tears,
And never at Oldstone these many years
On Christmas Eve do they ever show
A fresh-gathered sprig of mistletoe.
Sing ho! sing hey! &c.

"They were idiots to fight," said the Squire.

"I quite agree with you," said his wife.

"I suppose," observed Sir Marmaduke to the first speaker, "that had you been the Baron you would have ordered the two young men to shake hands—have stopped all quarrelling for that night at least."

"Of course, my dear," exclaimed my Lady. "I detest politics in families. And the White and Red Roses were political parties."

The Squire was not so certain about this; but if he had been the Baron, his opinion was that the best thing would have been to have summoned the chaplain, given away his daughter, made the Red Rose into a White one, and then all would have lived happily ever after.

A dance! A dance!

It was getting late; at least, so said the Grandfather's clock.

There was no "sitting out" in those days except when you were honestly tired.

The clock's old hands—cunning "old hands" both of them—stole on noiselessly upon all, except the few who might be listening for the regular mechanical beat, as it ticked off the seconds and approached nearer and nearer to the end of Christmas Eve, and the beginning of Christmas Day. The old people might have been listening, and have heard the sound of the clock above that of the music, and above the hum of the dancers. But for all that, they talked on and on, of the years that were past, of former meetings like the present, of those who had passed away, and whose places in their old haunts and their kindly memories could never again be filled.

It was the quadrille, and *le Cavalier seul* had to perform.

The Cavalier Seul was Mr. Tull.

Suddenly, in the very middle of his advance, he dashed forward, with a low exclamation that startled everyone out of their propriety, and made for the clock.

A scream—a woman's scream—a blow—a fall.

That unhappy Dick!

That confounded mistletoe!

He had been watching Constance, who had been charged with the duty of superintending the arrangement of the trays and glasses for the midnight wassail-bowl, in which the Health of Old Father Christmas was to be celebrated.

On her return he had waylaid her under the mistletoe. Ned had seen his arm passing round her waist, and that was enough, and too much, for him.

In a second the whole room was in an uproar.

The clock hands pointed warningly—five minutes to midnight. Old Father Christmas within five paces of the room.

Outrage, abuse, violence—a challenge!

All in two minutes, and Old Father Christmas within three paces of the door.

Rage, sorrow, and tears. Expostulation, explanation, accusation, and Old Father Christmas within one minute of the door!

"Stop, all of you!" cries Sir Marmaduke, imperatively, as he stands clasping his old wife round the waist, and holding one hand aloft, as if commanding their silence.

The solemn hour of midnight chimed forth.

Then, from without, in sweet harmony arose the old familiar carol, of which the sweet burden is—

"Peace on earth! To men goodwill!
Peace on earth!
To men goodwill!"

Ah! my good friends, "In the King's name, let fall your swords and daggers!"

What need to recount how this night ended or the next day began?

What need to say that the Honourable Dick got a lesson, and that Amelia read it to him? That Master Edward and Miss Constance found such support in Sir Marmaduke and my Lady that any opposition was withdrawn on the spot, and all ended happily?

And wasn't the little sprig of mistletoe preserved until it dried up, and became dust, and was lost, and was swept away with some other rubbish by a new housemaid in the course of the next quarter; and how it was asked for next Christmas and was not forthcoming? And how Sir Marmaduke sang the old song and told a new story—the story I've just been telling—which was thenceforth entered into the Chronicles of Oldstone Hall, where it may now be found by anyone who can find that invaluable work—to whom and every one else I send this greeting, and wish, as freshly and heartily as ever,

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Long and late were the revels in the old Tudor lodge on the occasion which our Artist has depicted. Ah! as Hans Breitmann said, on a memorable occasion, "Where is dat barty now?" But a trace to melancholy. There is no indignation, at all events, to remind us of that seventeenth-century Christmas merry-making, whatever may be the case as regards the feast—the liberal and abundant feast which we have in anticipation. They, that is to say, my Lord Bountiful and his pretty daughters and their gallant Cavalier guests, have evidently no fear of consequences before their eyes. Fast and furious, we suspect, has been the drinking as well as the dancing in the old hall this night. Yet those noble gentlemen must not be suffered to leave without the final rite of hospitality—the cavalier's parting stirrup-cup—to wish them God's speed; to keep their blood aglow on the journey through the frosty air along the snow-covered road, and as a pledge of another merry meeting. So, the guests being accompanied to the door or watched from the casement, their great riding-cloaks and slouched hats donned, their feet in the stirrups, the retainers in readiness with their torches to light them to the park gates, the bumpers of malmsey poured out from the silver tankards, there is nothing remains but to quaff the generous wine; and then one "Hurrah!" nay, another, and yet another, longer—"Hurra—h!" till the very dog joins in chorus, and the startled owls in the ivy take up the shout in a plaintive minor refrain, and even the rooks in the tall trees of the neighbouring wood caw a dream-like echo. No fear for these gay knights of a Roundhead surprise on their way home; the costumes tell us that the "King" had already "come to his own." The only fear which will haunt one of them is touching the prosperity of his suit with one of those pretty damsels standing in the doorway; but as it was this same gentleman who (unless we are falling into an historical error) shortly afterwards commissioned the Court painter of the time, Sir Peter Lely, to execute her portrait as a shepherdess in amber and blue satin, with a lapful of flowers, he could not have been kept long in suspense.



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Come, Birdie, Come.
Come sit by my side, little Darling.
Comin' thro' the rye.
Cottage by the Sea.
Cruiskeen Lawn.
Day when you'll forget me.
Death of Nelson.
Do not heed her warning.
Don't be angry with me, Darling.
Do they miss me at Home.
Do you ever think of Me.
Every Bullet has its Billet.
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Gipsy's Warning.
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Harp that once thro' Tara's Halls.
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Heart of Oak.
He isn't a Marrying-Man.
Home, Sweet Home.
Huntingtower.
I Love to Think of the Days
when I was Young.
Isle of Beauty, Fareye Well.
Kiss me, and I'll go to Sleep.
Kiss me, Mother, Kiss your
Darling.
Last Rose of Summer.
Leather Bottled.
Little Bunch Jug.
Little Bawn of Roses.
Little Church around the
Tower.
Little Sweetheart, Come and
Kiss Me.
Love among the Roses.
Love was once a Little Boy.
Mother, I was Young.
Meet Me by Moonlight Alone.
Minstrel Boy.
Mistletoe Bough.
Mollie, Darling.
Mother Kissed Me in my
Dreams.
My Heart's best Love.
My Mother Bids Me Bind my
Hair.

Norah, the Pride of Kildare.
Off in the Stilly Night.
Oh, Gently Breathe.
Oh, Armchair.
Old Log Cabin in the Lane.
Old Sexton.
One Bumper at Parting.
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Outlaw.
Pilgrim of Love.
Pilot.
Please, give me a Penny.
Poor Bessie was a Sailor's Wife.
Poor Old Joe.
Put me in my Little Bed.
Riding on a Load of Hay.
Ring the Bell Softly.
Ring the Bell, Watchman.
Robin Adair.
Rocked in the Cradle of the
Deep.
Roses Underneath the Snow.
Sally in our Alley.
Silver Moonlight Winds are
Blowing.
Silver Threads among the Gold.
Soldier's Tear.
Still I Love Thee.
Take this Message to my
Mother.
Tell me, Mary, how to Woo
Thee.
Thorn.
Those Evening Bells.
Tight Little Island.
Time may Steal the Roses,
I pray.
'Tis but a Little Faded Flower.
Token.
Tom Bowling.
True as the Stars that are
in the Sky.
Vacant Chair.
Vicar of Bray.
Waiting, Millard.
Waiting Old Stairs.
Waiting for Pa.
What is Home without a
Mother.
When a Man's a little bit
silly.
When Love's Love at Home.
When You and I were Young,
Maggie.
Where the Bee Sucks.
Why are you Wandering Here,
I pray.
Within a Mile of Edinboro'
Town.
Wolf.
Would you Buy my Pretty
Flowers.
Write me a Letter from Home.
Ye Banks and Braes.

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